University of Alberta

Schopenhauer Redux: A Contemporary Rereading of Schopenhauer's Theory of Compassion

by

Brendan Terrence Leier

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Philosophy

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 2002

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-81219-7

Canada

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author: Brendan Terrence Leier

Title of Thesis: Schopenhauer Redux: A Contemporary Rereading of Schopenhauer's Theory of Compassion

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year This Degree Granted: 2002

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and all other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as herein before provided, neither the thesis or any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

18 Osgoode Circle, Regina, Saskatchewan
Canada. S4V-0C1

Sept 27/02

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned have certified that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a Thesis entitled *Schopenhauer Redux: A Contemporary Rereading of Schopenhauer's Theory of Compassion* submitted by Brendan Terrence Leier in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Robert Burch

Dr. Glenn Griener

Dr. Margaret Van de Pitte

Dr. Jim Butler

Dr. Mark Migotti

This dissertation is dedicated to my dear Amanda.
I could not have done this without you. The work is done…now we dance!

Abstract

Schopenhauer's account of compassion (*Mitleid*) remains one of the most comprehensive and interesting accounts of this complex emotion. Although Schopenhauer's account is surprisingly comprehensive for the time, especially in terms of his understanding of comparative religion, history, and philosophy, he is forced to make several claims that do not serve his theory well in contemporary philosophy. What I attempt to do is reconsider some of the more problematic aspects of Schopenhauer's theory in light of several philosophical and religious traditions to which Schopenhauer had no familiarity. In the spirit of Schopenhauer's original effort, I will attempt to reconstruct a theory of compassion that is both conceptually accurate and philosophically palatable, i.e. does not require any appeal to religious belief or esoteric metaphysics.

In the first section I discuss in general the conception of compassion and introduce in detail Schopenhauer's theory as found in his work *On the Basis of Morality*. In the second section I examine several contemporary conceptions of compassion including the philosophical accounts of David Cartwright, Lawrence Blume, Nancy Snow, Martha Nussbaum, Max Scheler, and Martin Heidegger as well as the Christian accounts of Thomas Merton, Matthew Fox, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino. This section also includes a discussion of the Buddhist conception of compassion. In the third section I return to discuss Schopenhauer's

theory of salvation and attempt to resolve several philosophical problems his account poses as a whole. I suggest several solutions utilizing the sources from the second section and propose a new philosophical conception of compassion grounded in the idea of a 'philosophical practice' serving as the motivation for the manifestation of compassion.

Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks go out to the following people who made this work possible:

My Academic Team: Robert Burch (El Guapo Hefe), Margaret Van de Pitte, Glen Griener, Bernie Linsky, and Jim Butler. This project would not have been possible without your guidance and support.

My Family: Mom and Dad, Allison, Steph and Chris who have provided me unending support and love all these years. May we continue to grow closer in spite of our physical distance.

My Friends: Matt, Trev, Jackson, Chris, Cindy, and all the people who relentlessly teased me over the part few years to get this done, bought me dinner, hiked with me, looked after Lucy, etc. This has been a special time in Edmonton, one that we will all fondly remember when fate tears us apart. There is always thanksgiving in Saskatchewan.

The Black Dog Staff: I could not have done this work outside the atmosphere of the Dog, you all kept me well rooted in the world. Thanks Darren for giving me a chance to make some money and stay in school, also for being the weird son-of-a-bitch I have grown to love. Thanks Vinnie and John, for constantly providing amusing antics to take my mind off work and for not firing me when my anti-social tendencies manifested themselves (weekly). Thanks all the rest of the staff, the stupid-visors Susan, Arlie, Kelsey, Jay, Charles, my friends, Jen and Derek, all the door monkeys, and the lovely servers, past and present, especially Penny, Sally, Laura, and Audrie. Also, thanks to all the past staff who befriended me and helped me along the way.

Table of Contents

Introduction Pg.1

Chapter 1

Introduction to Compassion Pg.4

- **What is Compassion?.....Pg.5**

Chapter 2

Schopenhauer's Conception of Compassion.....Pg.9

- **On the Basis of Morality.....Pg.12**
- **Skepticism and Anti-moral Incentives.....Pg.13**
- **Three Incentives..... Pg.17**
- **The Great Mystery.....Pg.19**
- **The Two Great Virtues..... Pg.23**
- **Confirmations of the Expounded Basis..... .Pg.27**
- **On the Ethical Difference of Character.....Pg.29**
- **The Metaphysical Account.....Pg.30**

Chapter 3

Psychological Accounts of Compassion.....Pg.35

- **Cartwright on Compassion.....Pg.36**
- **Blum on Compassion.....Pg.39**
- **Snow on Compassion.....Pg.43**
- **Nussbaum on Compassion.....Pg.46**
- **Schopenhauer on the Psychological Accounts...Pg.52**

Chapter 4

Ontological Conceptions of Compassion.....Pg.56

- **A Christian Conception of Compassion.....Pg.56**
- **Fox on Compassion.....Pg.57**

- **Sobrino on Compassion.....Pg.60**
- **Merton on Compassion.....Pg.65**
- **Schopenhauer on Christianity.....Pg.68**
- **The Buddhist Conception of Compassion.....Pg.71**
- **Schopenhauer on Buddhism.....Pg.79**
- **Phenomenological Conceptions of Compassion..Pg.81**
- **Scheler on Compassion.....Pg.82**
- **Scheler on Schopenhauer.....Pg.88**
- **Heidegger on Empathy and Mit-dasein.....Pg.91**
- **Schopenhauer and the Phenomenologists.....Pg.94**

Chapter 5

Rethinking Compassion.....Pg.96

- **Rationality and Compassion.....Pg.97**
- **The Metaphysical and the Psychological.....Pg.101**
- **Compassion and Justice.....Pg.105**

Chapter 6

Schopenhauer's Theory of Salvation.....Pg.107

- **Schopenhauer's Theory of Salvation.....Pg.109**
- **The Manifestation of Compassion.....Pg.120**
- **Contemplation and Compassion.....Pg.129**

Conclusion and Final Thoughts.....Pg.132

Introduction: Schopenhauer Redux

In his short work published under the title *On the Basis of Morality*, Arthur Schopenhauer provides both an extended criticism of Kant's deontological ethics, as well as his own account of ethics, which places compassion at the foundation of morality. Although Schopenhauer gained little attention in his lifetime, his work became influential in the later nineteenth century and found a renewed interest in the latter half of the twentieth century. In particular, his attack on Kantian ethics has been the source of much inspiration to those attempting to advance contemporary versions of virtue ethics, and his conception of the will has influenced modern psychology from Freud to the present day. What we are interested in, however, is Schopenhauer's conception of compassion as it is articulated in the second half of *On the Basis of Morality*. This essay, too, has attracted a significant amount of attention and has been cited as the source of inspiration for many subsequent philosophers who have commented on the nature of compassion. Although at the time this small work went largely unnoticed and unappreciated, even losing a contest in which it was the only entry, it has subsequently served as *the* position on compassion to come to terms with and to criticize. Nietzsche, for example, severely criticizes Schopenhauer's attempt at grounding morality in compassion, rejecting it altogether, and yet constructs his own theory of 'will to power' based on an appropriation of Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will. The phenomenologist Max Scheler identifies Schopenhauer's idea of compassion as being praiseworthy in principle, but completely rejected his execution of a theoretical foundation. In contemporary philosophy, Lawrence Blum and Martha Nussbaum both identify Schopenhauer as being the driving force behind the attempt to re-integrate compassion into philosophical morality, and yet both reject his explanation of the emotion. I mention the above examples, since in the literature on compassion, the work of Nietzsche, Scheler, Blum and Nussbaum looms large.

While much credence is given to Schopenhauer's effort to incorporate compassion into moral philosophy, not much effort has been made to actually understand his view of compassion as a working philosophical theory.[1] This is due to the seemingly problematic philosophical, and in particular, metaphysical system that underlies much of his discussion of morality. While there seems to be a renewed philosophical interest in compassion, this interest does not extend to anyone becoming a Schopenhauerian, even if only for a short while. Unfortunately, as a working philosophical theory, Schopenhauer's philosophical system seems to have been relegated to the scrap-heap of modern philosophy.

In the light of this overall judgment on Schopenhauer's system as a whole, with the recent renewed interest in the topic of compassion, Schopenahuer is typically

[1] The exception to this has been John Atwell whose efforts (mainly successful) generally involve understanding Schopenhauer's works as an integrated whole rather that as contemporary working positions.

invoked only in a perfunctory way as being one of the first philosophers to have taken the role of compassion seriously in moral philosophy. Yet given the rejection of his system, Schopenahuer's actual attempt at formulating a coherent conception of compassion has been all-too neglected. I want to argue, however, that if we carefully consider Schopenhauer's account of compassion, it remains as one of the most thoughtful and careful accounts thus far. Unlike many other philosophers, Schopenhauer refuses to simply reduce compassion to the realm of psychology, and is not apprehensive about looking outside philosophy proper to understand the nature and character of this complicated phenomenon. It is this open-minded approach that I find so attractive about Schopenhauer's efforts, and that I have tried to emulate in the discussion which follows. Schopenahuer is not satisfied with an account of compassion that is just internally coherent. Rather, he believes the role of philosophy in this regard is to take account of how compassion actually functions in the world. In this sense, the arbiter of a good theory would be how accurately it can describe the diverse nature of the multiple occurrences and manifestations of compassion. To this end, Schopenhauer draws in particular on a wide body of secondary literature on the history of religions, both Western and, what for his day at least, was the cutting edge of scholarship concerning Eastern religions, specifically Brahman and Buddhist. In this regard, the intellectual background which Schopenhauer brings to the unfolding of his philosophical system is remarkable for his time. Indeed, the breadth of his knowledge and scholarship certainly compares well with his great contemporaries in the philosophy of religion proper, for example, with Hegel, Schlegel, Schleiermacher, etc.

I believe that it is possible to reassess Schopenhauer's account of compassion in the light of certain contemporary traditions unknown to Schopenhauer as well as reconsidering the Buddhist and Christian background in his work. In doing so we can provide a contemporary re-reading that is both resilient to traditional criticism and at the same expands the conception of compassion into a fully working ethical or moral account. I call this effort *Schopenhauer Redux*, because I hope to create a new conception of compassion by working for the most part with the substance and in the spirit of Schopenhauer's own account. I will proceed in the following way: In Chapter One, I provide a brief sketch of the nature of compassion, its historical usage and etymology. In Chapter Two, I provide a detailed exegesis of Schopenhauer's theory of compassion. In Chapter Three, I begin to consider contemporary notions of compassion beginning with what I refer to as the psychological conceptions of David Cartwright, Lawrence Blum, Nancy Snow, and Martha Nussbaum. In Chapter Four I consider what I refer to as ontological conceptions of compassion. These include the phenomenological conceptions of Max Scheler and Martin Heidegger, as well as Christian and Buddhist conceptions. In Chapter Five, I will begin to incorporate the contemporary conceptions of compassion with Schopenhauer's picture and set the stage for the final chapter in which I will introduce a normative conception of compassion following from an examination of Schopenhauer's master-work *World as Will and Representation*.

At first glance it may not be evident how these diverse sources tie together or how I have arrived at the decision to utilize these particular texts. Since the complete account of Schopenhauer's system is not provided until the final chapters, I must briefly explain the rationale behind the selection of the secondary sources I will use. My primary rule in this regard is to follow Schopenhauer's lead and to consider the examples he uses of traditions that hold compassion to be important as well as individuals whom he considers to be exemplars of compassion. His reference to Buddhism, for instance, leads me to examine the role of compassion in Mahayana Buddhism and draw from that reading a critique of Schopenhauer's use of Buddhist philosophy.

My use of the Christian theologians Thomas Merton, Jon Sobrino, and Matthew Fox shares a similar justification. Schopenhauer uses several examples of Christian history and theology in *World as Will and Representation* to advance his thesis concerning salvation and its relationship to compassion and the denial of the will. My choice of contemporary theological perspectives to contrast Schopenhauer's picture is determined by each author's emphasis on the role of compassion within his work. Each of the authors mentioned has a unique perspective on the necessary role of compassion in Christian theology and hence provide useful backgrounds from which I can reinterpret Schopenhauer's theory of compassion.

My choice of philosophical authors represents what I come to call the psychological perspective on compassion. The psychological perspective is important in Schopenhauer's work because it is through the criticism of this perspective that Schopenhauer finds himself turning to metaphysics, which involves him in a more esoteric explanation of the manifestation of compassion. Although Snow, Blum, and Nussbaum are all neo-Aristotelians to some extent, Schopenhauer's criticism of the psychological conception of compassion extends also to the ethical writings of David Hume and Adam Smith, both of whom advocated naturalistic, psychological conceptions as well. I examine these particular contemporary sources to understand the potential strengths and limitations of Schopenhauer's critique, specifically whether or not his rejection of the psychological ground of compassion stands the test of time.

I present the phenomenological theories of compassion of Max Scheler and Martin Heidegger as potential alternatives to Schopenhauer's metaphysical view, which, as we will see, he adopts with some apprehension. I introduce phenomenology as a way of satisfying many of Schopenhauer's criticisms of the psychological perspective without adopting a metaphysics that is even less desirable now than Schopenhauer found it to be.

While Schopenhauer maintains throughout *On the Basis of Morality* that his ethics is empirical, the empirical content (in the modern sense) of this dissertation will be limited. Schopenhauer uses the term empirical in a loose sense to indicate

that his philosophical ethics must describe the way human beings *actually* behave towards one another. This claim is obviously directed towards Kant's position in The *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, where Kant claims that the nature of ethics is determined *apart from and regardless* of how people actually behave. Accordingly, Schopenhauer's ethics would be more properly characterized as descriptive rather than empirical in the modern sense. I introduce some discussion of empirical evidence in chapter five to contrast what seems to be the popular opinion, influenced by evolutionary theorists and socio-biologists, that human nature is fundamentally selfish or egocentric as a function of survival. I briefly discuss the evolutionary theory of Elliot Sober and David Wilson who make a strong argument against the 'selfish gene' theory by re-examining the possibility of altruistic evolution. I also examine the social-psychological works of Alfie Kohn and Lt. David Grossman who both provide strong arguments against the common portrayal of the human character as essentially and necessarily selfish. These works certainly do not reflect the entire body of work in the biological and social sciences concerning altruism. However, this is primarily a philosophical text and my appeal to the empirical evidence will only serve to undermine a determinist picture of the nature of human character as represented by some scientific traditions.

I believe the range of sources I have chosen represents the best existing contemporary work on the nature of compassion. Apart from this valuable attribute, these sources also clearly speak to the very issues that puzzled Schopenhauer in both *On the Basis of Morality* and *World as Will and Representation* and that made understanding the nature of compassion such a priority in his thinking. I believe that in revisiting Schopenhauer's theory of compassion in light of this new evidence, we can rekindle interest not only in compassion, but in Schopenhauer's theory itself.

Section 1: The Problem of Compassion

Chapter 1: Introduction to 'compassion'

> *It is a feeling common to all mankind that they cannot bear to see others suffer... This feeling of distress is the first sign of humanity.*
>
> *Mencius*

My goal in revising Schopenhauer's theory is to present a concise and coherent philosophical account of compassion. Although there have been several accounts of compassion attempted in contemporary philosophy, they have been limited in their scope and breadth of field. My approach will consist of an attempt to give an account of compassion that makes full use of the philosopher's prerogative, as Schopenhauer did, to investigate a wide range of fields and traditions. What I hope to provide at the end is a picture of compassion that gives justice to not only the conditions and foundations of compassion, but also to the role it plays in moral life and it's potential to enrich contemporary conceptions of morality. In doing so, I must begin by making a few of my prejudices known so to warn the reader ahead of time. If one agrees with these assumptions, (there are actually only two) then this work may be of interest. If not, then the reader might as well not continue, for the contents of this work require the acceptance of certain broad characterizations about human life and well-being.

My first assumption is that compassion, as it is manifested in the social experience of a human life, is good and desirable. The nature of such compassion is not yet in question. What I assume here is that whether compassion is an emotion, or a feeling, or a deep metaphysical connection, etc., we appreciate its presence in our lives and agree that if given a choice, we would choose for there to be more, not less, compassion in the world. Although this does not seem particularly controversial, philosophers like Martha Nussbaum point out philosophical traditions such as Stoicism and Neo-Platonism might actually disagree with the cultivation of compassion in ones character. I will return to this claim later in this introduction, however, what must be said here is that the experience of compassion is still considered valuable, although some may see its attempted cultivation as either impossible or counter-productive from a moral point of view.

My second assumption is in the form of a general observation about moral philosophy in the Western tradition. I believe that compassion as a philosophical topic is conspicuously absent from the greater field of moral inquiry. Of course, I will have several suggestions later on as to why this might be the case, but for now we must consider this to be a problem or a puzzle to be solved. In the light of these two assumptions, I pose the following questions: If compassion is a cherished social value which seems to be inherent in our moral conceptions of the world, why does contemporary moral philosophy fail to provide an adequate descriptive account of it? Secondly, in regard to this question, why does the

prescriptive or normative tradition of moral philosophy fail to investigate the potential of developing compassion as the goal of a moral life? If these questions do not immediately resonate, the reason might be due to the fact that contemporary moral philosophy, for the most part, is not yet in a position even to consider these questions. Ironically, many contemporary efforts have been made towards a conception of philosophy that is non-foundational with a diminishing role for notions of reason and notions of objectivity. This trend is also reflected in moral philosophy, but in ways that most often hearken back to ancient traditions rather that toward new approaches. Is it the case that compassion has been, at some point in history, shown to be irrelevant to the field of moral philosophy? Certainly not to my knowledge, although many influential moral philosophers have certainly dismissed it's potential.

There is a simple way to clarify my extended caveat. Following Schopenhauer, my work will focus on two basic questions: first, what is the nature of compassion? How do we come to experience and interpret this experience and what role does it play in our lived experience? What is the relationship of compassion to our moral experience of the world and is it a necessary condition of that moral experience? Secondly, if it is possible, how can we nurture or facilitate the experience of compassion? Is it possible to become more compassionate? And if so, is it desirable? Are there limits to the experience of compassion? Is it possible to be too compassionate? Of course these questions have intrinsic links to one another and some require a great deal of groundwork before they can be honestly approached. The method I propose to investigate compassion might seem slightly obscure and roundabout to start, however I will do my best in justifying the framework I intend to use.

What is compassion?

Before I begin to examine Schopenhauer's account of compassion, it will be helpful to clarify the object of our inquiry without assuming too much about its specific nature. First, I hope to rely a great deal on our ordinary understanding of the word as it is used in our language and of the feeling, it is to be hoped, we experience from time to time. I will attempt to avoid, for the meantime, restricting the definition of the term to exclude any of its common sense usage especially for the purposes of methodology or taxonomy. What I mean by this, for example, would be something like claiming that compassion is an emotion, and thus proceeding to develop a reductive psychological explanation in the face of other potential descriptions. I do not exclude this possibility, but if it is to happen in a philosophical context, there must be good reasons provided. It should not simply be a matter of aesthetics, dogmatism, or parsimony. A comprehensive philosophical approach must consider all evidence and eliminate alternative accounts on the basis of sound argument, not theoretical convenience.

The English and French words 'compassion' and the German *Mitleid* mean literally to 'suffer with'. The Webster's definition is broader in that it adds a

secondary function, "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it". This two part meaning seems to have important etymological roots. The modern usage of the term compassion captures two separate notions, first an identification with the suffering of others, and second, a response or motivation to act to relieve this suffering. The Latin terms that are translated as compassion are *compătior*, the literal root, and *misericordia*, which is interpreted traditionally as compassion or mercy. Here the synonymy with mercy reveals compassion's active sense not only as a feeling but as a motivation to action. For example, one cannot both be merciful and passive at the same time. This twofold meaning of compassion reflects its sources in ancient Greek and Hebrew biblical texts. *Misericordia* is the Latin translation of two Greek words: (σπλαγχνιζομα) *splagchnizomai*, which means literally 'to be moved in one's bowels', and (ελεεο) *eleeo*, which means 'to have mercy for' or 'take mercy upon'. In the New Testament we see both terms translated as compassion in similar usages,

> But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion (*splagchnizomai)* [on him], Lk. 10:33
>
> Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion (*eleeo*) on thee. Mar. 5:19[2]

Both of these examples demonstrate the notion of compassion as being a feeling that motivates action. The use of bowels is significant here for it was seen as the seat of mercy or of pity. It is often the case, especially in New Testament translation, that compassion and mercy are used interchangeably. When no particular hermeneutic criteria are present, stylistic concerns seem to prevail in the choice.

The Hebrew translation[3] of compassion also seems to bear out the same relationship between two concepts. The terms *racham* רחם and *hesed or chesed* חסד are both rendered into English as compassion, the first having similar associations with the term mercy, and the second with loving-kindness, particularly God's love for humanity.

> And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion (*racham*) upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers; Deu. 13:17
>
> For I desired compassion (hesed), and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Hos.6:6

Hesed, especially, is a concept that defies one English translation. It is the notion of a loving kindness that lies at the root of action. In the book on compassion, the

---

[2] Blue Letter Bible Concordance (www.blb.com)
[3] Fox, Matthew. *A Spirituality Named Compassion.* Pg.8.

spiritual theologian Matthew Fox speaks about the Judaic sense of compassion and action,

> Compassion leads to works. Feeding, clothing, sheltering, setting free, giving drink, visiting, burying, educating, counseling, admonishing, bearing wrongs, forgiving, comforting, praying: all these acts of mercy are acts indeed. Though they come from the heart and go to the heart, they are not restricted to heartfelt emotions, however powerful. They all involve other people which is to say they are political activites.[4]

According to Fox, hesed is always involved as the foundation for justice which is one tradition that does not necessarily carry through the translation into Greek and Latin. Although compassion is used loosely in certain Greek and Latin translations, sometimes as (*sumpathes*) sympathetic, or as (*oikteiro*) to pity, it is most commonly associated with acts of mercy. The Greek bible uses *eleeo* to translate the Hebrew and in the Vulgate it becomes *misericordia*. I believe the most important sense of compassion that is carried through from the biblical traditions to English is the sense that compassion leads to action. In this regard it seems to be more than a simple feeling or sentiment. One aspect that does not necessarily come through, especially from the Judaic tradition is compassions relationship with justice, especially as being the foundation or justice. In the West, the notions of justice and 'emotion' or feeling have long been divorced, perhaps so much so that they are not conceived as being kindred whatsoever. This is one of the interesting aspects of compassion that I will investigate more thoroughly shortly.

There is some controversy in contemporary discussions of compassion concerning its relationship with different emotions in the same family. Depending on the author, compassion is used synonymously with notions of pity, mercy, empathy, fellow-feeling, and sympathy. Authors will also take great pains to make great taxonomological distinctions between compassion and each of these similar emotions. For instance, Nietzsche is criticized heavily for running together Schopenhauer's notion of compassion (*Mitleid*) with his criticism of Christian 'pity' also translated *Mitleid*, but with a profoundly different meaning than Schopenhauer's. Nancy Snow and Lawrence Blum claim that pity differs fundamentally from compassion in that to pity someone does not require the subject to feel that the same fate might befall him or her. For example, I might feel pity for the drug addict while at the same time thinking that I can never befall the same fate. Pity, then, is morally inferior to compassion which requires an emotional identification with the sufferer, a 'that could be me' perspective. Martha Nussbaum, on the other hand, defends the use of the term pity as a synonym for compassion, arguing that the introduction of the term pity into Western literature via Rousseau and others was not accompanied by the same notion of condescension that contemporary authors attribute to it. Nussbaum does claim, however, that compassion and empathy differ fundamentally in the respect that empathy does not necessarily have an accompanying sense of good will for

---

[4] Fox, Matthew. *A Spirituality Named Compassion*. Pg.8.

its subject. For instance, being empathetic may make one a better torturer or criminal, not necessarily concerned with another's well-being. Lawrence Hatab subsequently considers compassion to be a more restricted aspect of empathy, where compassion is only concerned with another's suffering; empathy can also share in joy and other emotions.

What seems clear at this point is that although there are some intuitive differences between compassion and similar experiences, it is not particularly helpful, philosophically speaking, to place much emphasis on them. Apart from appeals to use in natural language and background folk psychology, there is no hard etymological evidence that settles these matters to anyone's satisfaction. I believe it is a much more useful approach to create a strong positive conception of compassion using these types of distinctions only where they serve a real purpose. I am willing to let the matter stand by focusing on what significance our contemporary conceptions of compassion draw from the comparisons and understanding how the distinctions work towards a greater conception of compassion.

Chapter 2: Schopenhauer's Conception of Compassion

Introduction

Schopenhauer's ethical thinking has several unique aspects that place it apart from the philosophical tradition of the time. His Eastern perspective, his metaphysics of the will, and his profound pessimism all contribute to a rich, if not unique, image of human life. In providing a careful exegesis I hope to make these unique contributions clear and show how they work together to form to a unique conception of compassion. I think it is also surprising, despite many contrary critical assessments, just how resilient his idea of compassion can be.

Because Schopenhauer views compassion as an ethic, the *role* of compassion is front and centre in his account. In some of his work, this strong focus tends to neglect the development of a richer conception of the *nature* of compassion, which is the goal of my project. Keeping this in mind, I hope to show how Schopenhauer's account becomes hamstrung as a result of not fully developing an account of the nature of compassion before he posited its important role in moral philosophy.

Although it would also be possible to investigate compassion outside an ethical context, this option would not be satisfactory. The notion of compassion does have an intimate role inside moral theory. I believe, however, that it is the nature of compassion as a phenomenon of human experience that dictates its possible role inside moral theory, not the converse. We must understand the nature of compassion before we can posit its ethical potential. Proceeding otherwise is to place the cart before the horse. Therefore, my comments about compassion's role in moral theory will come at the end of the project.

Schopenhauer sees his account of compassion as a direct response to Kantian rationalistic moral theory. In fact, the first half of the essay *On the Basis of Morality* is a sustained attack on Kant. Schopenhauer attempts to create what Max Scheler calls an 'Ethics of Sympathy',[5] meaning that all moral action is a result of some form of 'fellow feeling'. For Scheler, David Hume and Adam Smith also fall into this camp. Although Hume's account seems to be closest to Schopenhauer's concerning the role of emotions in ethics, there are important differences between the two accounts. For instance, Schopenhauer introduces metaphysics into his account that Hume would certainly not be comfortable with. This metaphysics, however, allows for Schopenhauer's account of compassion to extend beyond kin-relationships or any other type of natural boundary. In this sense, he pushes the boundary of a biological or reductively naturalistic account of fellow feeling. In this way, in terms of the extension of moral consideration, Schopenhauer's ethics is best understood as a radical reaction to Kant's moral philosophy rather than an extension of Hume's. Hume's name is never mentioned

[5] The Nature of Sympathy. Pg.5

and his writings are never discussed by Schopenhauer in connection any of his ethical work.

It is difficult to categorize Schopenhauer's moral thinking. The tendency to 'find him a home' in the canon is often overwhelming. Indeed, his writing does resonate with many familiar moral intuitions. However, it is also unique in many regards. David Cartwright describes Schopenhauer's moral philosophy as follows,

> Schopenhauer presented an ethics of being, a virtue ethics; one that concentrated on moral character and moral psychology. He argued forcefully against prescriptive forms of ethics, purely rationally based ethics, and non-empirical ethics. Schopenhauer developed a descriptive and empirical ethics in which passion and desire are viewed as the primary sources of moral behaviour, moral world views, and moral character.[6]

Cartwright's use of the term virtue ethics tempts us to understand Schopenhauer as falling into that contemporary category of moral theorists. Indeed, Schopenhauer's attack on Kant's deontology is mirrored in style and content by several contemporary authors[7]. However, Schopenhauer's single minded alternative to a life of willing and desire would not fit well into current conceptions of the good life that see ethical concerns playing a limited role. Schopenhauer's notion of salvation more resembles a stoic or ascetic form of life than that fit for an artist or an intellectual. It may be formally correct to think of Schopenhauer as a virtue ethicist, certainly he believed compassion to be a virtue manifested by a good character. However, in many ways this title is not helpful since that term has taken on such a unique meaning in moral philosophy. Schopenhauer incorporates virtue in a limited sense; there is only one moral virtue, which is compassion. Again, this sole focus does not resonate with contemporary virtue theorists who seek emancipation from single-minded moral theories with limited conceptions of the good.

Cartwright's term 'an ethics of being' has much more descriptive potential. As we shall see, Schopenhauer's ethics is not prescriptive. Indeed, he scorns both Kant's and Mill's attempts at prescriptive moral theory. Schopenhauer sees his ethics as being exclusively descriptive; he attempts to capture the sense in which people *are moral*, in contrast to Kant who believes people may potentially never be moral. This is the greatest distinction between the two. Kant believes he contributes substance to morality; adherence to the categorical imperative *is what it is to be moral*. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, believes that all he can do is point to what he considers to be authentic moral behaviour. In fact, he cannot even give an adequate empirical accounting of morality. The limitations of his empirical ethics, at one point, force him to introduce a metaphysics to account for the 'mysterious' manifestation of moral behaviour. Through the light of his philosophy of will, Schopenhauer can only attempt to make sense of how individuals transcend their own desire to consider the needs of another. The

---

[6] The Basis of Morality Introduction, pg.xii henceforth, BM
[7] Nagel, Wolf, Williams, and MacIntyre come to mind.

inability of his empirical account to fully comprehend the moral being plays back into his philosophical system.

In a sense, moral theory grows out of Schopenhauer's philosophy like a weed through concrete. It has little room to establish itself and one is always surprised at the sight of it. Nevertheless, it makes use of its small domain and perseveres, much to even Schopenhauer's amazement. This amazement is expressed in his comment,

> This event is certainly astonishing, indeed, mysterious. In fact it is the great mystery of ethics; it is the primary and original phenomenon of ethics, the boundary mark beyond which only metaphysical speculation can venture to step.[8]

The description of this 'state of being' that is the moral is the real goal of Schopenhauer's thinking. In a sense, the inability to account for morality empirically makes way for his metaphysics of the will. The difficulty for him is to provide a coherent answer to the question while staying true to his neo-Kantian worldview.

Schopenhauer's work on ethics begins in the main work *World as Will and Representation*, and its presence continues through the second revision of WWR into all the later philosophy. In this regard, to truly give a sense of Schopenhauer's ethics, one would have to give some accounting to all his works. However, the occasion of two philosophical essay prizes allowed Schopenhauer to, in one brief period of time, formulate his vision of moral philosophy in two small works he published together in 1841 under the title *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*.

The first essay, entitled *On the Freedom of the Human Will*, won first prize in a contest sponsored by the Norwegian Scientific Society. The second essay, *On the Basis of Morality*, submitted to the Royal Danish Society, did not fair as well, despite the fact it was the only entry[9]. Because both essays were subject to blind review, neither could refer to Schopenhauer's main work. He was subsequently obliged to give complete 'stand-alone' descriptions of his views on moral philosophy.

Schopenhauer's two essays were written, and were meant to be understandable, not only independently of each other but also independently of his "chief work"....After all, the two essays were, upon requirement, submitted to the respective Royal societies "in cognito". Yet the two essays clearly bear on each other in significant ways: First, only when the question of the "freedom of the will" has been answered, Schopenhauer holds, can the "foundation" and indeed

---

[8] BM. Pg.144

[9] The awards committee did not seem pleased with Schopenhauer's entry, officially declaring it off topic, but hinting at another reason, "Finally, we cannot pass over in silence the fact that several distinguished philosophers of recent times are mentioned in a manner so unseemly as to cause just and grave offence".

the very nature of morals be determined; and second, the notion of the human character plays the central role in the accounts of both freedom and morals.[10]

In order to begin to describe Schopenhauer's views on compassion, I will begin with a brief exegesis of the second essay, *On the Basis of Morality*. I will then take up the first essay and discuss Schopenhauer's account of freedom of the will. To flesh out the picture afterwards, I will draw on his main work and some subsequent smaller texts.

As it stands, I do not intend to defend Schopenhauer's work against all comers; my own belief is that his conception of compassion is flawed. However, I do intend to further his investigation in *spirit*. What this means is that I hope to understand compassion in its widest possible sense, including aspects of this phenomena that traditionally lay outside the domain of philosophy. Schopenhauer was not at all apprehensive about characterizing compassion in terms of religious traditions or particular moral exemplars he believed personified the phenomena to its greatest potential. Subsequently, what he demanded from a philosophical description would have taxed even the most esoteric idealist philosophies of the time. Added to this was his insistence that his philosophical account be, at first, strictly empirical. As we saw in the first chapter, the inevitable difficulty that resulted from this strict requirement left him turning to a metaphysical explanation to make sense of compassion.

Keeping with the Schopenhauerian spirit, the second goal of this section is to lay the ground for a renewed philosophical account of compassion. The spirit to which I refer attempt to continue Schopenhauer's belief in the moral potential of compassion which has never given adequate attention in the philosophical tradition. In challenging some of Schopenhauer's ideological commitments I hope to open up new conceptual ground in which to extend my own philosophical account of compassion. This also will include, I hope, some greater reflection on the normative potential of a philosophical theory of compassion. Fortunately, the secondary literature challenging Schopenhauer's moral philosophy, although not vast, is of excellent quality and will provide several starting point from which to develop a robust theory of compassion. I believe Schopenhauer begins in the clearest and most honest sense. His understanding of the problems associated with providing a philosophical account of compassion is profound and he does not succumb to the pressures of reducing his observations to any preconceived theory.

On the Basis of Morality

As our interest lies in Schopenhauer's account of compassion, I will begin with the second half of BM called "The Foundation of Ethics". The first half of the

[10] Atwell, John. Schopenhauer: The Human Character. pp. 6-7

essay is an extended criticism of Kant's metaphysics of morals. Schopenhauer has several fundamental criticisms of Kant's ethics and these are supplemented by many 'lesser' objections. Contemporary opinions vary concerning the effectiveness of Schopenhauer's criticisms. David Cartwright accuses Schopenhauer of often employing a "selective reading" of Kant; John Atwell attributes Schopenhauer's critique as "anticipating many criticisms of Kant's ethics that have gained favour in recent times"; and Schopenhauer's work is featured in a interesting discussion in Rawls' *Theory of Justice* and again in *Political Liberalism*.[11] Although Schopenhauer's criticisms are still often considered to be serious challenges to the Kantian moral project, for Schopenhauer they are more; they are reason enough to suggest that moral philosophy take a completely different direction.

> I shall probably be told that ethics is not concerned with how people actually behave, but it is the science that states how they *ought* to behave. But this is the very principle which I deny, after showing clearly enough in the critical part of this essay that the concept of *ought*, the *imperative form* of ethics, applies solely to theological morality, and that outside this it loses all its sense and meaning. I assume, on the other hand, that the purpose of ethics is to indicate, explain, and trace to its ultimate ground the extremely varied behaviour of men from a moral point of view.[12]

One can see here the sense in which Schopenhauer holds his ethics to be empirical. Its primary task is simply to describe what if anything can be considered to be an example of moral behaviour. His method, as he would have us believe, provides only a description of moral behaviour. This 'moral point of view' is a perspective from which all other motivations can be investigated for possible conflicts of interest, which would obscure and undermine the integrity of any well-meaning description of morality. Hence, Schopenhauer eliminated religious, pragmatic, and eudemonistic motivations from the running in order to boil down what might be meant by 'moral motivation'. One might think that Schopenhauer would be pessimistic about the existence of such a state, but surprisingly, he is not. He certainly does not grant the title of moral easily however. The goal of his reduction is to provide what he considers to be a rigorous, descriptive, accounting of ethics. What he ends up with is a mystery.

Scepticism and anti-moral incentives

Following his attack on Kant's moral system, Schopenhauer believes he has returned to the starting point, to the origins of moral philosophy.

> Thus even Kant's basis of ethics, considered for the last sixty years as a firm foundation, sinks before our eyes into the perhaps eternally inexhaustible abyss of philosophical

[11] It is not my goal here to adjudicate the debate over the merits of Schopenhauer's attack. I believe the argument has been well treated in Julian Young's paper "Schopenhauer's Criticism of Kantian Ethics". Young provides a fair treatment of the debate, dismissing several of Schopenhauer's points, but leaving much room for a strong critique.
[12] BM. Pg.130

> error, for such a basis proves to be an inadmissible assumption, and merely theological morals in disguise. As I have said, I can assume as already known that the previous attempts to found ethics are even less satisfactory. Such are usually unproved assertions drawn from the air, and at the same time, like Kant's foundation itself, artificial subtleties calling for the finest distinctions and resting on the most abstract concepts.[13]

From this point, Schopenhauer must construct an ethic from the ground up. At this point he begins again without the benefit of a transcendental groundwork. He engages in what may be called a 'negative ethic', an approach to dismiss all action attributed in error to morality. His first step is to consider the most extreme view, i.e. that there may be no object to his inquiry, there may be no morality. Perhaps, he muses, "there is no natural morality at all that is independent of human institution?" This question makes clear exactly what Schopenhauer is after. The term natural morality refers to a natural disposition to extend consideration to another. There are several possible examples we might think of here, but Schopenhauer is looking for the example that cannot be reduced to kinship, religion, fear, honour, or any other non-moral motive. Rightly then, he begins to inquire into what exactly might count as evidence of such an action.

In very broad strokes, Schopenhauer speculates about the general state of society and how there comes to be a belief in morality to begin with. He begins by supposing that natural morality does not exist. Perhaps the behaviour we describe as altruistic can be understood as a function of the institutions of law and justice. Citizens behave either out of fear of punishment or to defend the status quo. This picture can make sense in terms of some aspects of justice, the maxim 'harm no one' might be accounted for in this way. However, the justice system is certainly not omniscient, nor are we protected by the powers of the state in all circumstances. Schopenhauer rejects this picture with two clear objections,

> Justice and the police cannot suffice everywhere, for there are offences whose discovery is too difficult indeed, the punishment of some of them, where we are left without public protection, is a precarious business. Moreover, civil law can at the very most enforce justice, but not philanthropy and beneficence, since here everyone would like to be the passive part and no one the active.[14]

It is clear that cleverness or anonymity do not always result in criminal behaviour, even in the case of individuals who can clearly commit crimes with no fear of punishment. More importantly, Schopenhauer argues, the justice system only provides deterrence for individuals who would transgress laws; it provides no motive for positive moral behaviour. Incidences of anonymous charity and good will cannot be legislated, and rare as they may be, their existence cannot be denied.

Although it seems that Schopenhauer's first attempt at reduction is incomplete, he continues to speculate as to what other incentives might motivate just acts. He

---

[13] BM. Pg.120
[14] BM. Pg.121

considers what other kinds of motivation might be responsible for this positive aspect of seemingly moral behaviour, if only to compliment the potential role of justice as ground. Religion is one possibility and conscience another. Religion is not given full treatment here, other than the claim that many people who are not religious lead moral lives. It is enough, then, for Schopenhauer to show that religion is not a necessary condition for morality although he believes it may be a sufficient one at times. Conscience is an idea that he deals with more carefully. An initial problem with the idea of conscience is similar to the idea of natural morality. There seems to be a sceptical concern dealing with the authenticity of conscience. Schopenhauer claims that what are often taken for glimpses of conscience are actually fears of punishment for transgressions committed. Rules and governing beliefs also have the same sting as that of so-called conscience. It is therefore difficult to posit such an entity when its effects are indistinguishable from several other behaviour governing considerations.

> Many a man would be astonished if he saw how his conscience, which seems to him such an imposing affair, is really made up. It probably consists of one-fifth fear of men, one-fifth fear of the gods, one-fifth prejudice, one-fifth vanity and one-fifth habit; so that he is essentially no better than the Englishman who said quite frankly, "I cannot afford to keep a conscience."[15]

In fact Schopenhauer's positive theory of conscience simply identifies it as the pangs of guilt felt upon witnessing the qualities of our character as it unfolds itself through experience.[16]

In Schopenhauer's estimation, there are two governing factors that have the most effect on limiting the behaviour of individuals.

> In reality, universal honesty and uprightness, as practiced in human intercourse and affirmed in the most unshaken maxims, rest mainly on two external necessities: first, on the order of the law whereby everyone's rights are protected by public authority, and secondly, on the recognized necessity of a good name or civil honour for making ones way in the world.[17]

We have already discussed the importance and limitations of the law, but the second idea Schopenhauer believes is as important. He considers public opinion concerning ones character to be of the utmost concern to most people. Schopenhauer maintains that reputation is one possible means of establishing equality both in character and in means. If one is thought to be a scoundrel, it is virtually impossible to succeed in business or any other legitimate endeavours. In a more immediate sense, equality of character is equally important and beneficial. If I appear to have honour, I stand below no one; I am equal in the respect that my character cannot be questioned. This extreme emphasis on personal character seems to be less important in contemporary society, however, in Schopenhauer's day, even duels were still commonplace over matters of honour. Schopenhauer

---

[15] BM. Pg.122
[16] Kant and Schopenhauer both have curious notions of conscience which I will return to.
[17] BM. Pg.122

deeply despised the tradition of knightly chivalry, but did not underestimate the profound effects of dishonouring oneself.

> In consequence of a single dishonourable act a man runs the risk of being an outcast from civil society for the rest of his life. He will be one whom no none will ever trust again, whose company will be shunned by everyone, and from whom all advancement is thus cut off.[18]

For Schopenhauer, honour and its accompanying confused and somewhat perverse ideologies have a profound influence on the behaviour of the individual. This individualistic motivation, combined with the external motivations of law and punishment provide a coherent picture of some positive motivation. Combine these with religious commitments, and perhaps a small role for conscience, and we have, without appeal to natural morality, a seemingly well-founded explanation of why people are motivated to be just.

It is clear Schopenhauer believes that several motivations or combinations of motivations can be responsible for behaviour often mistaken to be of moral origin. The questions now are: what role does morality play if it is displaced by so many other motivations? and in light of the sceptical view of morality, what evidence remains that would require us to believe in natural morality to begin with? Schopenhauer's next step is to examine in closer detail the form in which our incentives come to us. His is the only remaining possibility for discovering the existence of natural morality and uncovering its role in the life of an individual. Clearly, in light of the sceptical consideration we have dealt with, its function will be limited, but to what extent?

> All these skeptical objections taken together certainly do not suffice to deny the existence of all genuine morality, but to moderate our expectations of this moral tendency in man and consequently of the natural foundation of ethics.[19]

An empirical ethic must take seriously the motivation of the moral along side all others. It must give an account of how moral motives can be distinguished from other motives and when we can be justified in making that distinction. However, with our expectations thus 'moderated', what can we expect to remain?

> Therefore there is no other way for discovering the foundations of ethics than the empirical, namely, to investigate whether there are generally any actions to which we must attribute *general moral worth.* Such will be actions of voluntary justice, pure philanthropy, and real magnanimity. These are then to be regarded as a given phenomenon that we have to explain correctly, that is, trace to its true grounds. Consequently, we have to indicate the particular motive that moves man to actions of this kind, a kind specifically different from any other. This motive together with the susceptibility to it will be the ultimate ground morality, and a knowledge of it will be the foundation of morals.[20]

---

[18] BM. Pg.125
[19] BM, pg.128
[20] BM, pg. 130

What is called for then is an investigation of incentive, i.e. motives for action. Schopenhauer hopes that this description will clearly show the limits of morality in everyday life, but in a realistic capacity, one that will be clearly and distinctly appreciated. There seems to be no ambiguity in Schopenhauer's conception of morality. Thinking back to our brief discussion of virtue ethics, we see how dissimilar Schopenhauer's goal is here. If anything, he seems to be purging what he sees to be an already polluted notion, rather than expanding it to embody alternative conceptions of moral worth. For Schopenhauer, the moral virtues of justice, magnanimity, and kindness are kindred if not identical. Their manifestation is also, according to Schopenhauer, traceable to one root. With Schopenhauer's single new goal in mind, we can continue to fill out his ethics.

Three incentives

Schopenhauer holds the view that every human action is intentional[21]. Every action must also have a motivation or incentive. For Schopenhauer there are three main incentives that correspond to the goals of human action. The first, and most prevalent, is egoism or the desire for ones own weal. The second is malice or the desire for another's woe, and the third is compassion or the desire for another's weal. For Schopenhauer, all human actions fall under these categories. In section §14, he discusses the first of three incentives, egoism, under the heading *Antimoral Incentives*. Schopenhauer believes that egoism is the most prevalent human incentive for actions and indeed, the interpretation of the ground for any particular action must begin with it.

> He (man) desires to have the greatest possible amount of well-being and every pleasure of which he is capable; in fact, where possible, he attempts to develop within himself fresh capacities for enjoyment. Everything opposing the strivings of his egoism excites his wrath, anger, and hatred, and he will attempt to destroy it as his enemy. If possible, he wants to enjoy everything, to have everything; but if this is impossible, he wants at least to control everything. "Everything for me and nothing for others" is his motto. [22]

This 'everything for me' perspective is the foundation of most action. It must be supposed that this incentive transcends naïve self interest, of course. Many civilities and apparent acts of kindness are also motivated by ego, i.e. the desire to get ahead, the desire to defend one's social status, the desire for emotional happiness, etc. Schopenhauer certainly does not avoid the rigorous search for egoism in any facet of life that might otherwise be politely overlooked. His interpretation of ego is interesting in that he describes it not only as a powerful incentive for action, but as a matter of perspective as well. In a manner that has influenced many subsequent philosophers, Schopenhauer describes egoism as "towering above the world" and appends a simple empirical claim about incentive with a rather interesting subjective twist. Schopenhauer claims that although egoism is the most common incentive for action and naturally flows from our character, it is not simply the case that we are egoistic all the time or that our

---

[21] *Essay Concerning The Freedom of the Will*. Pg.31
[22] BM, pg. 132

egoism is directly determined. He seems to hold out the possibility that it may also be a question of what perspective we adopt. It is therefore the case that although I have a tendency to make myself the centre of my universe, there is another perspective available to me. The question remains, however, how much influence, if any, do I have in adopting one perspective over the other? Schopenhauer explains egoism as flowing quite naturally from our own process of understanding the world and others.

> This is due ultimately to the fact that everyone is given to himself directly, but the rest are only given to him indirectly through their representation in his head; and the directness assert its right. Thus in consequence of the subjectivity essential to every consciousness, everyone is himself the whole world, for every object exists only indirectly, as mere representation of the subject, so that everything is always closely associated with the self consciousness.... Now while in his subjective view a man's own self assumes these colossal proportions, in the objective view it shrinks to almost nothing, to a thousand millionth part of the present human race. Now he knows with absolute certainty that his supremely important self, this microcosm, whose mere modification or accident appears as the macrocosm – thus the entire world of this self – must disappear in death, which for him is equivalent to the end of the world.[23]

This 'subjective' or 'microcosm' perspective might be considered itself a potential description of morality; indeed, it would be very similar to the perspective of ethical egoism. At times Schopenhauer's conception of the all-pervasive will in nature would seem to indicate that this is indeed the human condition. His explanation for such a phenomenon is also clear. The only immediate human experience is that of will, or desire. What we know of the needs and desires of others is only understood indirectly, it is normally only a function of reason and representation. Our own desire, on the other hand, is felt. The will appears first and foremost to us and ceaselessly accompanies us. We serve our own will because it occupies a privileged experiential status.

Our will, of course, is most often mediated by our reason, which means simply that we do not indulge every one of our felt desires. Desire manifests itself in a multitude of forms and Schopenhauer is quick to adopt this observation he attributes to Eastern philosophy. In the Western tradition, desire is usually treated in terms of its validity, i.e. higher vs. lower pleasures, rational vs. animal, etc. Schopenhauer is the first modern philosopher to question the moral legitimacy of egoistic desire itself. He turns from the idea of enlightened self-interest as a possible moral category and chooses instead to categorize all willing for oneself as either immoral or amoral. However, he does not believe that egoism is the only human incentive. He is not seduced by this potential reduction of individual to egoistic subject alone. In emphasising the role of egoism in human action Schopenhauer believes he is honestly accounting for what real motivations exist, he is, like Dante before him, "taking into consideration the sombre side of human nature".

---

[23] BM, pp.132-3

The Great Mystery

Schopenhauer thought begins to turn away from the ego in §15 where he considers what possible criteria there might be for judging an action as having arisen from non-egoistic incentives. He returns to his empirical posture by asking,

> ...whether actions of voluntary justice and disinterested loving-kindness, capable of rising to nobleness and magnanimity, occur in experience.[24]

The answer to this question is not always clear, however. From an empirical perspective, all we are given is the deed, or the result of willing. We never clearly understand the motive behind the action. Here Schopenhauer sees that his empiricism has arrived at a stalemate. Although he has no proof of a moral incentive, Schopenhauer petitions the reader's common sense on the matter.

> But I believe there will be very few who question the matter, and are not convinced from their own experience that a man often acts justly, simply and solely that no wrong on injustice may be done to another. In fact I believe there are those who have, as it were, an inborn principle of giving others their due, who therefore do not intentionally hurt anyone's feelings, who do not unconditionally seek their own advantage, but who in this connection also consider the rights of others.[25]

Schopenhauer realizes that it is possible to question the incentive of any motive and that scepticism of this sort can never be fully addressed. His response is to draw a line where on one side the belief in non-egoistic action exists, and on the other, only ego exists and subsequently the examination of a foundation for morality is not possible. If all action is selfish, then moral philosophy falls under the same rubric as alchemy and astrology, a science with no substance or real object. This represents Schopenhauer's first leap of faith. One must believe in the possibility of acting for another's weal in order to identify the ground of such action.

After using several examples of selfless action, including the action of a famous European war hero, Schopenhauer claims that these examples, alongside the many occurring in everyday life, are the substance of what must be considered morally worthwhile behaviour. To be precise, an action that is devoid of self-interest or egotistical motivation is an action of moral worth.[26] The question that remains now is, what could possible be the motivation of such an action? If people do not act to satisfy their own will, what then is their motivation?

---

[24] BM, pg.138
[25] BM, pp.138-9
[26] Putting aside for now actions that may have no self interest but are obviously not moral i.e. malice or cruelty.

In §16, Schopenhauer begins his proof of the only genuine moral incentive. He believes so strongly in this proof that he begins by listing the axioms on which the proof is built. I will paraphrase them here,

(1) Every action must have a motive.

(2) When the sufficient cause is present, the action must take place.

(3) The will is moved by weal and woe. The presence of weal and woe in an individual manifests itself as either in agreement or disagreement with the creatures will.

(4) Every action refers to, and has as its object, a being with a will who is consequently capable of experiencing weal and woe.

(5) Either this being is the doer of the action or the recipient.

(6) An action whose object is the weal of the doer is egotistical.

(7) This weal applies to action and non-action alike, i.e. acting, or the prevention of an action for selfish purpose.

(8) Egoism and moral worth are mutually exclusive. If one exists the other cannot.

(9) Because Schopenhauer denies the idea of duty to oneself[27], the moral character of an action is found only in reference to other people.[28]

In conclusion, Schopenhauer maintains that if an action is done with the doer's interest in mind, it is egotistic and therefore has no moral worth. Egoistic actions also include those of remote or distant benefit, otherworldly benefit, i.e. heaven and hell, actions aimed at petitioning the sympathy of others or increase our esteem in their eyes, or any other action that fulfills the personal desire of the individual. The only example of a non-egoistic action is an action done solely for the benefit of another. As he mentions earlier, however, there is always a gap in our knowledge between the result of an action and its motivation. For instance, if I were to help an elderly couple by repairing their roof, this action could be seen as being exclusively in their interest. However, I might also have some underlying motive, perhaps to improve my reputation, or to repent for my sins, etc. Two problems arise from this. Schopenhauer has dismissed the first sceptical problem, that being the possibility that individuals never act except out of self-interest. The second problem is this,

---

[27] He argues contrary to Kant in §5

[28] Inevitably, other sentient beings as well. This is an astounding aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy that has been treated in Gary Varner's "The Schopenhauerian Challenge in Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985)

> But now if my action is to be done simply and solely *for the sake of another*; then his *weal and woe* must be *directly my motive*, just as my weal and woe are so in the case of all other actions. This narrows the expression of our problem, which can be stated as follows: How is it possible for *another's* weal and woe to become directly my motive, and this sometimes to such a degree that I more or less subordinate to them my own weal and woe, normally the source of my motives.[29]

For the reader, the gravity of Schopenhauer's problem is not immediately evident. If I want to act for another's interest, I might simply use my imagination, for instance, and suppose what he or she would prefer. For Schopenhauer, however, the problem is greater. Because egoistic and non-egoistic actions are mutually exclusive, one has to explain how non-egoistic action becomes a motive of incentive powerful enough to replace the ever-present will. If we recall, the will is directly given to us while other objects and individuals are only ever known to us through representations in the mind. Is it possible, then, for a representation to replace the immediate will as an incentive for action? Schopenhauer's answer is no. Then how is it, if not via the imagination, that we come to act for the interest of another?

> Obviously only through that other man's becoming the *ultimate object* of my will in the same way that I myself otherwise am, and hence through my directly desiring his weal and not his woe just as immediately as I ordinarily do *my own*. But this necessarily presupposes that, in the case of his own *woe* as such, I suffer directly with him, I feel *his* woe just as I ordinarily feel only my own; and, likewise, I directly desire his weal in the same way I otherwise desire only my own. But this requires that I am in some way identified with him, in other words, that this entire *difference* between me and everyone else, which is the very basis of my egoism, is eliminated, to a certain extent at least. [30]

Schopenhauer is describing what seem to be some very unusual criteria for acting on behalf of another. First, one must act in such a way that another's benefit is the object of one's immediate will. This is not so much an observation as it is a definition of non-egoism. Secondly, I must experience the other's suffering as I do my own, i.e. I cannot infer or imagine it, I must feel this suffering along with him. This is Schopenhauer's most controversial statement thus far. Schopenhauer holds that to understand the suffering of another indirectly is never enough to motivate unselfish action. This in itself is not counter-intuitive, as we are all aware and understand the suffering of millions of people everyday and fail to act on their behalf. However, Schopenhauer believes that to make another's weal the goal of my actions I must feel his suffering as I feel my own. This is a difficult claim as it stands in the face of Schopenhauer's own metaphysics of the will. How can I feel another's suffering as I feel my own? There is no way to interpret this claim metaphorically, as Schopenhauer quite adamantly insists on its literal interpretation. He maintains that the moral motivation occurs in an instant where the separation between self and other disappears. In other words, I achieve some identity with the other and subsequently, feel his suffering and desire to

---

[29] BM, pg.143
[30] ibid.

alleviate it as I would my own. In this way, I act for the interest of another, as it is literally my own interest. Schopenhauer's argument does not yet take a metaphysical turn, it is still in an eliminative form.

1. We know people act in unselfish ways.
2. It is impossible to be both acting egoistically and non-egoistically.
3. If our actions are non-egoistic, they must have another's interests as a motivation.
4. Only the will can motivate an action.
5. My own will only desires my own weal and avoids my own woe.
6. If I am truly acting for another's benefit, I am willing for another.
7. If I will for another, I must be directly experiencing his suffering as my own in order for my actions to occur.

Even for Schopenhauer this phenomenon of identification is puzzling. However, it is clear to him that the phenomena of 'willing for another' does not admit to any other explanation and that without it, there is no accounting for the fact of moral behaviour.

> Now since I do not exist in the other man's skin, then only by means of knowledge I have of him, that is, of the representations of him in my head, can I identify myself with him to such an extent that my deed declares that difference abolished. However, the process here analyzed is not one that is imagined or invented; on the contrary, it is perfectly real and indeed by no means infrequent. It is the everyday phenomenon of compassion, of the immediate participation, independent of all ulterior considerations, primarily in the suffering of another, and thus in the prevention or the elimination of it; for all satisfaction and all well-being and happiness consist in this....This event is certainly astonishing, indeed, mysterious. In fact, it is the great mystery of ethics; it is the primary and original phenomena of ethics, the boundary mark beyond which only metaphysical speculation can venture to step.[31]

Here we witness the end to Schopenhauer's 'empirical' ethics. The road of observation has lead him to the brink of 'metaphysical speculation'. This places him in an obviously uncomfortable situation. From the start he has supposed his ethics to be empirical, claiming that he was simply reporting on how people behaved rather than how they ought to behave. Now, if we accept his first leap of faith i.e. the idea that people can act for the benefit (or weal) of others, we seemed to be forced into accepting a second, more difficult leap of faith. This involves, according to Schopenhauer, an experience of metaphysical identity with another individual such that his suffering becomes my own suffering and thus I act to remedy it. It would be clearer if Schopenhauer made explicit his reasons for dismissing out of hand the possibility that this form of identity is realized through some psychological faculty. It is much simpler to imagine the situation faced by a suffering individual and how I may feel in his place. But he does not. Schopenhauer's only answer comes in the form of the censure of the Italian philosopher Cassina's "Analytical Essay on Compassion".

---

[31] BM, pg.144

> His view is that compassion arises from an instantaneous deception of the imagination, since we put ourselves in the position of the sufferer, and have the idea we are suffering his pains in our person. This is by no means the case; on the contrary, at every moment we remain clearly conscious that he is the sufferer, not we; and it is precisely in his person, not in ours, that we feel the suffering, to our grief and sorrow. We suffer with him and hence in him; we feel his pain as his, and do not imagine that it is ours....But the explanation of the possibility of this is not so easy; nor can it be reached on the purely psychological path, as was attempted by Cassina. It can be arrived at only metaphysically...[32]

This description is all that stands in the form of a positive argument for the 'anti-psychologistic' thesis. It is certainly not substantial enough to dismiss all reductions to psychology as it stands. I have suggested that Schopenhauer's theory of causality might be behind this commitment. However, as I am only giving a brief introduction to Schopenhauer's theory of compassion here, this problem will have to be more clearly fleshed out in the "Objections to Schopenhauer's Theory" section following this one. As it stands now, Schopenhauer's theory of compassion requires a metaphysical foundation or at least explanation as to how I may directly experience the suffering of another. While he promises such a foundation, he briefly detours in §17 to argue that compassion is indeed the foundation of his two cardinal virtues, justice and loving-kindness.

The Two Great Virtues

Instead of moving directly to his metaphysical theory of the ground of compassion, Schopenhauer anticipates some of his reader's possible apprehensions concerning his sudden metaphysical turn. In response, he directs the discussion in a more substantial direction, looking to buttress his claim that compassion is the ground of all moral action. He does this by arguing that felt compassion is the fundamental incentive behind what he considers to be the two cardinal virtues: the virtue of justice, and the virtue of loving-kindness (philanthropy). He considers these to be the cardinal virtues "since from them all the others follow practically, and can be derived theoretically." Schopenhauer's principle of ethics is as follows "injure no one, on the contrary, help everyone as much as you can", and can be formulated precisely from these two virtues. The virtue of justice is responsible for fulfilling the first, negative, component (harm no one) and the virtue of philanthropy is responsible for the second, positive, component (help everyone as much as you can).

In his theory of justice, compassion works in a negative fashion, usually preventing a subject from following his or her own egoistic inclinations.

> Therefore the first degree of the effect of compassion is that it opposes and impedes those sufferings which I intend to cause to others by my inherent antimoral forces. It calls out

[32] BM, pg.147

> to me "Stop!"; it stands before the other man like a bulwark, protecting him from the injury that my egoism or malice would otherwise urge me to do.[33]

In Schopenhauer's view, we are constantly tempted to follow our will, often at the expense of other's well-being. The will displays *primi occupantis,* or right of first occupancy in human consciousness and therefore every action that curbs this will comes from some form of principle external to it. Schopenhauer's task here is to give some account of why he considers compassion to be the ground of the virtue of justice; an idea so often formulated entirely in terms of objective and reason based principles of fairness.

Schopenhauer does not abandon the notion that justice is based on abstract principles. On the contrary, he argues that compassion does not manifest itself in every instance of a just act. Compassion's role here is to provide the moral source from which principles are abstracted. In this regard, our sense of justice is constructed throughout our lives through the abstraction of instances of felt compassion into principles of justice.

> For although principles and abstract knowledge are by no means the original source or first foundation of morality, they are nevertheless indispensable to a moral course of life: they are they are the receptacle or reservoir which stores the habit of the mind that has sprung from the font of all morality, a habit that does not flow at every moment, but when the occasion for its application arises, flows along the proper channel.[34]

The ability to be a just person, then, involves bringing together two human capacities of different possible potentials. The first is the capacity to feel compassion, and the second is the ability for rational abstraction and deliberation.[35] For the virtue of justice to become manifest, the character of an individual must be susceptible to the call of compassion, as well, one must have a strong capacity for reason and abstraction.

Schopenhauer returns to the consideration of a possible sceptical response to his claim concerning justice. As there are so many other motivations that may manifest themselves in similar actions, it is difficult to establish that one action might stand out as being truly just. Certainly actions whose incentives are prudence, or deceit, or religious adherence, might appear the same as a just action. In his usual pessimistic tone, Schopenhauer responds by agreeing with this possibility, indeed, affirming the intuition that many actions never require the

---

[33] BM, pg.149
[34] BM, pg.150
[35] Schopenhauer mentions as an aside here that men and women have different capacities for moral behaviour, men being more just and women having a greater potential for caring and sensing the suffering of others. In contemporary moral philosophy, the same point comes to light, although certainly not via the same argument, in the claims of philosophers like Carol Gillian. She argues in the *Ethics of Care*, that women demonstrate an approach to ethics that departs from the standard rational, abstracted approach found in traditional philosophical ethics. Gillian argues that women tend to develop ethical relationships that focus on the immediate needs of those around them. These inter-personal relationships serve as the locus of a moral outlook, rather than the abstract calculations or reflection on principles.

concept of true justice to be coherently interpreted at all. His response remains, however, that we experience acts of justice in our everyday lives that are unquestionably unselfish and just. To press the sceptical point beyond the bounds of common sense is philosophically possible, but to proceed in this way is to give up the possibility of the investigation of morality all together, as well as to turn one's back to the obvious but mysterious instances of these phenomena.

The second cardinal virtue to which Schopenhauer refers is the virtue of loving kindness or philanthropy. As described earlier, regarding the formulation of his 'principle of ethics', the virtue justice satisfies the first demand "Harm no one" while philanthropy satisfies the second, positive, demand "help everyone as much as you can". Schopenhauer believes his account will be on firmer ground if he can show that both these virtues have their source in the experience of compassion. While he showed that compassion is indirectly responsible for the virtue of justice, he believes that it is directly responsible as the incentive responsible for philanthropy. Philanthropy reigns above justice as the greatest virtue because it is both directly informed by compassion but also positive in nature. To love one's neighbour is to not simply refrain from harming him, but also to help him whenever he requires it. It is in the experience of helping others that compassion is manifest in the most mysterious sense. Philanthropy is the act of helping another by any active means, and again, while Schopenhauer claims that there are many selfish incentives for helping others, there are also examples we are witness to every day that have no apparent selfish motive whatsoever.

According to Schopenhauer, philanthropy has not been included as a virtue in Western thinking until the dawn of Christianity. "Even Plato, who rises to the greatest heights in morality, gets only as far as voluntary, disinterested justice.[36]" It is only the New Testament's 'command to love', "Christianity's greatest merit", that brings Western ethics into the same class as the Hindu and Buddhist moral schemes. In fact, Schopenhauer sees the Old and New Testaments combined as being representative of the two cardinal virtues. The Old Testament emphasises the importance of justice, while the emphasis on the unselfish character of philanthropy is the New Testament's main focus. The Gospels are important for Schopenhauer as he sees them affirming his strict characterization of a true moral action.

> The very precepts, added to the Gospel by the commandment of love, such as "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" and the like, are based on a feeling of what I have deduced here, namely, that another's distress alone, and no other consideration, must be my motive if my action is to have moral worth.[37]

The possible fulfilment of the New Testament's command to love flows directly from the experience of compassion. It is in the experience of another's suffering that the possibility of overcoming one's own will and acting for another's benefit

---

[36] BM, pg.162
[37] BM, pg.165

is realized. Schopenhauer makes use of the term *caritas* to describe compassion in the Christian sense. *Caritas* or *agape* in Greek is the greatest of the Christian virtues, best translated as love. This description is interesting because it blurs the distinction between compassion and love or charity. Schopenhauer is seldom careless in this manner, so it would seem that he is opening some new conceptual possibilities without taking the opportunity to fully examine them. As this exegesis must proceed, we will also have to return to this interesting point.

Instead of providing a concrete argument showing compassion to be the ground of philanthropy, Schopenhauer returns again to examine the phenomena he finds so fascinating,

> But now how is it possible for a suffering which is not *mine* and does not touch *me* to become just as directly a motive as only my own normally does, and to move me to action? As I have said, only by the fact that although it is given to me merely as something external, merely by means of external intuitive perception or knowledge, I nevertheless feel it with him, feel it as my own, and yet not within me, but in another person....But this presupposes that to a certain extent I have identified myself with the other man, and in consequence the barrier between the ego and the non-ego is for the moment abolished. I no longer look at him as if he were something given to me by intuitive perception, as something strange and foreign, as a matter of indifference, as something entirely different from me. On the contrary, I share the suffering in him, in spite of the fact that his skin does not enclose my nerves. Only in this way does his woe, his distress, become a motive for me; otherwise it can be absolutely only my own.[38]

Schopenhauer is compelled again to push towards a metaphysical explanation of how this phenomenon exists; he reiterates his claim that it cannot be accounted for empirically, that is has no psychological foundation. Though compassion is rare, it is still ever present to us in the undeniable form of philanthropy or acting unselfishly for another's benefit. He concludes the section, interestingly enough, by claiming that ethics is the "easiest of all the branches of knowledge" since everyone must construct it for herself. One must develop and follow principles based on the felt experience of compassion. It is thus obvious that natural compassion is the root of moral action since its manifestation is universal. This universal morality would not be the case if to be moral require one to learn and adopt a 'ready-made' moral system. Schopenhauer reverses the tables, as it were, to demand an explanation of the existence of 'natural' morality existing outside the influence of philosophy. His is such an account, and he seems to prefer building it by using a very long inductive argument. Although each segment thus far has fallen short of the expectations raised by the title, Schopenhauer is pushing slowly to build consensus to his picture by appealing to common sense and our natural intuitions concerning morality. §19 continues the attempt to drive home his point via observations and speculations about the nature of morality.

---

[38] BM, pg.166

Confirmations of the Expounded Basis of Morals

> The truth I have now expressed, that compassion, as the sole non-egoistic motive, is also the only genuinely moral one, is strangely, indeed almost incomprehensively paradoxical.

Thus Schopenhauer begins §19. He will attempt, with ten examples, to show that his convictions concerning morality are borne out by experience and common sense. He does not seem convinced at this time that his argument can stand alone and he has until this time relied on adamance and repetition rather than substantial argumentative structure and content. To his credit, he has written a promissory note to be paid at the end of his investigation, but before turning to that, he wishes to more firmly ground his account in common sense and observation.

Schopenhauer's examples employ two strategies. The first attempts to show how his account of compassion best fits our common intuitions concerning moral judgements; in other words, using stories and examples that show compassion in the best, most universal light. The second strategy is a form of abduction, or inference to the best explanation, driven again by our intuitions. In the second strategy, Schopenhauer uses what he sees as competing alternative moral theories as well as his own to compare the readers moral intuitive responses to several situations and dilemmas. Although these strategies are once again roundabout, they work surprisingly well, at least well enough to keep the reader's mind open for the long-awaited metaphysical finale.

I will briefly discuss several of Schopenhauer's strategies, in particular the ones I find to be most effective or helpful to his general argument. In his second example, Schopenhauer examines our moral response to acts of extreme cruelty. The cruelty in question concerns certain grotesque deeds of the day, not unfamiliar to our time, one being a mother heinously murdering her children, the second referring to a fight between two men where the victor tore the jawbone off the vanquished man and carried it away as a trophy leaving his opponent still alive. Schopenhauer examines our responses to hearing such atrocities. He writes,

> ...when we hear of such things, we are seized with horror and exclaim: "How is it possible to do such a thing?" What is the meaning of this question? Is it: How is it possible to have so little fear of the punishments of the future life? Hardly. Or: How is it possible to act according to a maxim that is so absolutely unfitted to become a general law for all rational beings? Certainly not. Or: How is it possible so utterly to neglect one's own perfection and that of another? Again, certainly not. The sense of that question is certainly only this: How is it possible to be so utterly bereft of compassion? Thus it is the lack of compassion that stamps a deed with the deepest moral depravity and atrocity.[39]

Schopenhauer's point seems to be that we fear and loath those who fail to demonstrate the basest form of compassion or caring for another. In the absence

---

[39] BM, pg.170

of this compassion, there does not seem to be a governing principle sufficient to compensate for its lacking. What this example points out is that generally speaking the expectation of justice is always present and many theories of justice may seem sufficient in explaining these everyday demands. In extreme circumstances, however, there are criteria for moral behaviour become more clearly focused and one seems to stand out more that the rest. For Schopenhauer, it is justice, grounded not in principle, but in compassion. We demand this elemental consideration from one another and when it is absent, it becomes the focal point of our reproaches. In contemporary psychological taxonomy, the sociopath is one who cannot make emotional connections with others. There is no corresponding pathology to describe the inability to apply the categorical imperative. What this example shows is that compassion, in Schopenhauer's sense, is expected of us, and its absence leads to severe societal reproaches.

The third example demonstrates the unlikeliness that religion could act in place of compassion and be considered the foundation of morality. On the one hand, it seems that peoples without a religious morality did not and do not behave and worse that Christian or Islamic nations (the Greeks are mentioned as an example). On the other hand, it seems that nations who live in contact with religious morality behave just as, if not more, poorly than those who do not (Christian Europe is the example here).

Example four shows how boundless compassion is always associated with greatness of character. In fact, it is clear that it is contradictory to consider them as existing apart. From compassion follows kindness and justice. However, it is impossible conceive the validity of the claim "he is virtuous, but has no compassion" or "he is unjust and cruel, but also very compassionate".

The fifth example shows compassion to act beyond the scope of mere justice as the source of moral censure. It is the knowledge of causing a great suffering that would prohibit us from defrauding a poor man out of $100, when stealing the same amount from a wealthy man or the government may not bother us at all. It is the understanding of the great suffering caused that prevents us from committing the crime, certainly not the maxims formulated by the principle of justice.

The seventh example is one I have alluded to once before, that is, that compassion is more encompassing than justice or rational moral principles because it includes animals under its consideration. Schopenhauer, in a very thoughtful argument, insists that this moral extension is a heretofore-overlooked aspect of moral theory that rational moral philosophy cannot account for. Indeed, he is correct in this belief, and sad to say, contemporary philosophy has still not made up for this oversight. Regardless of his terrible reputation, the passages describing the suffering of animals and the unexplainable capacity of human cruelty, give Schopenhauer a profoundly human and compassionate face. His anecdotes describing the ability of animals to move human beings to compassion also drive

the account into a profound direction, showing it to require an explanation that transcends mere anecdotal accounts of fidelity between friends or kin.

The last two examples reiterate Schopenhauer's theory, and appeal to some of his favourite thinkers from Seneca to Rousseau. All the examples show compassion to be overlooked but firmly placed at the root of all moral sentiment. As unsatisfying as abductive arguments tend to be, Schopenhauer's barrage of examples provide some very convincing evidence in the absence of a clear positive argument. For reasons that we will soon recognize, Schopenhauer has done the best with what has had to work with as well as within the strict limits he has seen fit to place upon himself.

On the Ethical Difference of Characters

Before concluding his account of compassion, Schopenhauer is faced with a troubling question.

> If compassion is the fundamental incentive of all genuine, i.e. disinterested, justice and loving-kindness, why is it that one man is influenced by it whereas another is not? Is it possible that ethics, in discovering the moral incentive, is also capable of setting it in motion?[40]

His answer to this question is a vehement no. Schopenhauer holds that compassion is the manifestation of character. Character, in turn, is given to us innately from birth; it cannot change over the course of one's life. Schopenhauer presents little argument for this claim at the start of this section, so he returns to his use of examples and appeals to authority of the history of philosophy. In appealing to Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and several more contemporary philosophers and schools of thought (including Christianity), Schopenhauer claims that virtues and vices exist in us from birth and seldom ever change apart from the strength of their manifestation. I will also repeat here that Schopenhauer deals with this question in great detail in his prize essay, *On the Freedom of the Will*.

His strongest argument in this essay comes from Kant, whose epistemology Schopenhauer relies on to a great extent. Kant claims that the *intelligible character* underlies the phenomenal aspects of out empirical character as it is given to us. Subsequently, since the qualities of plurality, individuation, and change are all formally only understood in the phenomenal sense, their root, our true essential self, can never change; it is always the same.

> Only in this way can we explain the rigid unalterability of characters that is so astonishing and familiar to anyone with experience.[41]

---

[40] BM, pg.187
[41] BM, pg.190

This is a very interesting claim and one that Schopenhauer will return to again. For now, however, it seems to be his main contention as to why compassion cannot be taught or learned, and how ethics cannot then have a normative component. This is a striking blow for anyone who supposes to form an ethic of compassion, for Schopenhauer is true to his word when he claims that it is the role of ethics to *describe* and nothing more.

In chapter two I will return to this question to fully examine its ramifications, however, I wish to raise an issue at this time. In comparison to the rest of this treatise, two things differ in this section. The first is that Schopenhauer does not account for apparent empirical evidence of people's characters actually changing, i.e. Saul changing to Paul on the road to Damascus and the like. Either Schopenhauer must account for these changes inside his theory, which seems impossible, or he must deny they occur and explain them away, which is not in keeping with his so called empirical method. In either case, the burden of proof does not seem to lie in Schopenhauer's favour. This is the first real methodological dilemma I have discovered in this short essay and it will be fruitful to return to it when we again discuss the nature of character.

The metaphysical account

In §22, Schopenhauer finally sees fit to discuss the mysterious foundation of compassion. He begins, however, by maintaining that the previous discussion should provide more than enough evidence to convince his reader that compassion is indeed the source of all non-egoistic and truly moral actions. Schopenhauer qualifies his long awaited metaphysical explanation by downplaying its relevance. In "leaving the firm ground of experience", one hopes to catch a glance at some truth more consoling than is revealed by the less exciting empirical method. Although this is a foray into metaphysics, Schopenhauer warns the reader not to expect too much esoteric content in the style of his fellow post-Kantians. What he offers is a meagre, but clear and concise explanation concerning the mysterious root of compassion.

Schopenhauer begins his account with a general observation based on the previous sections. In referring to the general characteristics of a 'good man', he says the following,

> But if we go back to what is essential in such a character, we obviously find it to reside in the fact *that he makes less of a distinction than do the rest between himself and others*. In the eyes of the malicious, this *distinction* is so great that they take immediate delight in another's suffering, and accordingly look for pleasure without further advantage to themselves, indeed, even to their own disadvantage.[42]

This distinction will become very important to Schopenhauer, for it serves as the key intuition for the foundation of his metaphysics. The difference between the

[42] BM, pg.204

good and bad man, for Schopenhauer, is the extent to which they distinguish themselves from others. The aspect of distinguishing is given in several degrees in Schopenhauer's work. One seems to be on par with a thought experiment or process of imagination; one might say a matter of perspective. There is another sense, however, that Schopenhauer finds to be more important. That sense refers to the understanding or intuition of a true metaphysical unity between all human beings, potentially all sentient beings. This is the identity that Schopenhauer alludes to but does not make clear until now. The identification with others via the imagination or other psychological processes has been previously dismissed but never replaced. Now Schopenhauer is providing a conception of identity with which he intends to ground his metaphysics of morality.

The empirical foundation of egoism is firm and clear for Schopenhauer. The only direct knowledge we have access to is that of our will. We only have knowledge of others indirectly. Subsequently, our knowledge of their wills, and more importantly, the incentive to act of their behalf is incomplete. What I know is that the difference between myself and another seems to be clear and absolute. However, even though we can clearly understand our phenomenal will as it is given to us, what we are not given is insight into the foundation of our will, or our '*inner-most essence-in-itself*'. In a proto-Freudian (but transcendental) fashion, Schopenhauer claims that we have no direct knowledge of the true ground of our will. What is hidden to us is the very essence of what we are.

> We see only outward; within it is dark and obscure. Accordingly, the knowledge we possess of ourselves is by no means complete and exhaustive, but very superficial; regarding the larger, and in fact main part of our existence, we are strangers and a riddle to ourselves, or, as Kant puts it, the ego knows itself only as phenomenon, not according to what it may be in itself. Regarding that other part which comes within our knowledge, everyone is indeed quite different from another; but it does not then follow that the same is true of the great and essential part that remains hidden from and unknown to everyone. Thus there remains at least a possibility that it may be one and identical in all.[43]

What Schopenhauer is suggesting here is as follows: According to Kant's *Transcendental Aesthetic*, time and space are given to us insofar as they are forms of our intuitive perception of the world. What this means is that we understand temporality and spatiality as aspects of the phenomenal world; they are not proper components of the noumenal realm, i.e. things-in-themselves. If space and time have this character, Schopenhauer argues, then so must plurality, i.e. the ideal capacity of consciousness through which we experience the distinction between individuals[44]. It follows, then, that what manifests itself in the phenomenal world as a plurality or number of individuals, must in the deepest reality be only one essential quality. Individuals, people, and sentient beings, must be considered only exemplifications of one essence. In the same way that time and space only exist in our conscious perceptions of them, so does the distinction between individuals only exist in our phenomenal understanding.

---

[43] BM, pg.206

[44] This idea exists well into the 20th century in the form of the theory of 'pansychism'.

Schopenhauer points out that this idea certainly does not have its origins in Kantian epistemology. In fact, it has existed as long as the recorded history of the world and has been embodied in every philosophical and religious tradition, only exiting in the West one hundred years previous. This notion of a 'world soul' is present in its most ancient form in Vedic literature, then in the ancient Greeks, through Christianity and Islam, and finding it final home in Spinoza's pantheism. According to Schopenhauer, this idea has been at home in both religious and philosophical traditions and in Europe was purged almost simultaneously with the execution of Giordano Bruno who was a strong proponent of this so-called heresy. It is clear here that the idealist philosophers and the religious share something in common. The idealist can posit some reality which underlies the phenomenal world and can subsequently posit a metaphysical ground for the feeling or inner knowledge of compassion. Schopenhauer claims this to be another, intuitive form of knowledge. The religious also posit the same metaphysical belief in the form of pantheism or panentheism, i.e. the idea of God in all, etc.[45]

The consequences of this view for Schopenhauer's theory of compassion are quite evident. The mystery that could not be explained empirically finds a possible solution in the transcendental realm.

> Accordingly, if plurality and separateness belong only to the phenomenon, and if it is one and the same essence that manifests itself in all living things, then that conception that abolishes the difference between ego and non-ego is not erroneous…in fact, compassion is the proper expression of that view. Accordingly, it would be the metaphysical basis of ethics and consist in one individual's again recognizing in another his own self, his own true inner nature.[46]

The good man is able to recognize himself in others. The bad man, on the contrary, cannot overcome the egoistic division between himself and his fellow beings; he is forever separate and apart from them. It is these two extremes that act as the bookends to human existence. All people tend to fall somewhere into the spectrum of individuation, from the Mahatma (the great soul) to the sociopath who's living experience is absolutely devoid of empathy. Schopenhauer is not so much committed to following Kant down this path, as he is happy to use his master's work to justify a doctrine as old as human history.

Schopenhauer believes that the ability to identify with another is all-pervasive. It is not simply an aspect of character, but permeates that whole character itself. The good and bad characters exist in entirely different worlds in that the perspectives adopted by each are completely contrary. The bad character exists in the microcosm; the entire world is sublimated to its will. The good character

---

[45] This view is very clearly worked out in many of Schopenhauer's contemporaries, particularly in Hegel's philosophy of religion and the theology of Schleiermacher. Schopenhauer, however, had little patience for any of his contemporaries, especially Hegel who he particularly despised.
[46] BM, pg.207

exists in the macrocosm; its own benefit is seen simply as a small part of the whole.

> The prevalence of one or other of those two modes of knowledge shows itself not only in individual actions, but in the whole nature of consciousness and disposition, which is, therefore, so essentially different in the good character from that which is in the bad. The bad man everywhere feels a thick partition between himself and everything outside him. The world to him is an absolute non-ego and his relation to it is primarily hostile; thus the keynote of his disposition is hatred, spitefulness, suspicion, envy, and delight at the sight of another's distress. The good character, on the other hand, lives in an external world that is homogeneous with his own true being. The others are not a non-ego for him, but an "I once more".[47]

Schopenhauer, as he promised, does not dwell long on his metaphysical explanation. In the end of this section he yet again ties his account of compassion back into experience. This feeling of union or identification that compassion provides has long been understood by the religious and non-religious alike. Schopenhauer refers to it as "practical mysticism"; in fact it is the "essence of all mysticism proper". Yet compassion cannot be understood in the ordinary sense, it cannot be explained, it must be experienced.

With the metaphysical explanation in hand, it becomes clearer why Schopenhauer insists that the ground of ethics is cloaked in mystery. It is also clear why he is so apprehensive about attempting a solely empirical account of compassion. Many commentators are puzzled, however, as to why Schopenhauer did not simply present a naturalistic account along the lines of Hume. Indeed, when he brushes against that question in the essay he avoids even giving a strong critique of the natural picture. There are two potential explanations. First, I believe (and I will develop this thought in the next chapter) that his empiricism is actually the ground for his turn to the metaphysical picture. The natural picture of compassion simply does not provide a sufficient explanation of the many forms of compassion that manifest themselves in our everyday experience. The natural account cannot describe compassion towards animals, persons we don't know, or our own enemies. Secondly, Schopenhauer theory of the causality or action does not provide for any other incentive than one's own will. The benefit of another cannot directly move my will unless it is in my interest. Therefore, without some direct identification with another, my will cannot act for their benefit. In Chapter 2 our examination of Schopenhauer's masterwork *World as Will and Representation* will provide a much clearer picture of this.

Introduction #2, or extra-duction

Schopenhauer rightly insists that compassion is mysterious. In his short essay he bridges the gap between distinct conceptions of compassion. His need to straddle this gap is reflective of the nature of different accounts of compassion that his reader might be familiar with. The David Hume/Adam Smith account is

[47] BM, pg.210

naturalistic, i.e. it can be reduced to psychological and ideally biological functioning. These accounts usually deal with aspects of kinship to explain compassion, however, some introduce rational reflection as motives for extension of compassion outside the kin group (Smith). Versions of these accounts of compassion and altruism are for obvious reasons still fashionable today and tend to be even more radically reductive in nature than those of Hume and Smith.[48].

The second account Schopenhauer was familiar with is what I will call the religious account. Versions of this account are heavily metaphysical, some with a theistic bend, i.e. the Judeo-Christian account, others with none, i.e. the Vedic/Buddhist account. These accounts are similar in that they tend to introducer the idea that the feeling of compassion is different than a simple emotional state. Usually, the account posits a communion between selves which takes place on a more intimate scale, either literally, i.e. in the communion of a 'world soul', or figuratively, i.e. involving a change in perspective resulting in the disappearance of a division between self and other. One can see how an account like this would be difficult to describe using purely empirical language. However, despite his 'empirical ethic', Schopenhauer seems to be committed to some form of this account most of the time.

Schopenhauer wishes to adopt a perspective akin to the first account to criticize Kantian morality and to reinterpret the role of philosophical ethics. However, his description of the phenomena of compassion is not adequately supported by the first due to its empirical constraints. He subsequently melds the two approaches as he sees fit in quite a clever pragmatic turn. Because he is not committed to normative ethics, he does not deal with the problem of motivation. Motivation is a problem in a normative ethic because it demands a practical account; if we agree that compassion is a desirable state, one must ask the question 'how do I become compassionate?'. Schopenhauer, in the descriptive voice, denies this role to ethics for two reasons. The first is simply because his ethics is exclusively descriptive, the second because he is a determinist concerning the nature of character, i.e. he believes compassion to be a property of character and character to be determined. This means, of course, that he does not see motivation to *be* a problem because he does not believe in the possibility of humans being in any way motivated to become compassionate. I believe that it is Schopenhauer's equivocation between the two accounts that results in a picture of compassion that is subsequently maligned by his commentators. However, his daring attempt at combining elements of both pictures provides a rich source of inspiration to draw from. We will be returning to these themes again and again through the following chapter using this brief introduction as a guide.

[48] I am thinking here of Socio-biology.

Section 2: Theories of Compassion

As I have previously mentioned, there have been many attempts, both historical and contemporary, to identify the nature of compassion and ascribe it some role in the psychological and philosophical lexicons. Compassion is of course a popular topic of discussion in religious traditions. Its roles range from central one in Buddhism, to a more peripheral, although important one in Christianity. In psychological circles, the term compassion is often subsumed under the seemingly wider notions of empathy or sympathy. There is a wealth of literature ranging from experimental to theoretical on these two 'emotions' and I will draw a great deal from it. However in our investigation, it is still to be determined how to understand the relationship between these psychological concepts. The question also remains concerning the relationship between philosophical and psychological conceptions of compassion. It has been the trend in philosophical analysis to either defer to psychological accounts of emotion in describing compassion or to create philosophical accounts that reduce to psychology. I will carefully investigate these tendencies and attempt to judge both their merits and potential pitfalls. As I have mentioned, I believe that the philosophical conception of compassion should take full advantage of the wealth of tradition associated with compassion and not immediately defer to psychology in the effort to construct a clear picture. What is necessary then is to find a starting point that attempts to incorporate a wide view of compassion, one that does not avoid the transgression of predetermined boundaries for the sake of methodological prejudices.

Chapter 3: Psychological accounts of Compassion

The purpose of section 2 is twofold. First I wish to introduce several of Schopenhauer's critics. Secondly, in responding to each critic, I hope to draw together the elements of a new picture of compassion that incorporates the structure of Schopenhauer's analysis and a critical refinement of his position. To what extent our new position will resemble Schopenhauer's is yet undetermined. However, I will attempt to adhere to the structure of his analysis as much as possible. I keeping with this, I will divide his critics loosely into two schools. The division will occur broadly along Schopenhauer's division of psychological/empirical accounts of compassion and metaphysical accounts. Instead of his term 'metaphysical', however, I will use the term 'ontological' to describe the second category. I choose the term because I will be referring to a wide variety of critics in this section, including religious commentators and phenomenologists, and the term metaphysical does not accurately describe certain approaches.

The psychological accounts I will discuss come from current philosophy rather than Schopenhauer's contemporaries. It would be possible here to discuss David Hume or Adam Smith, both of whom share emotive accounts of morality, but I prefer to discuss the current thinking on compassion partly because it is a

refinement of the older theories, and partly because these theories correctly represent the findings of recent work in social and cognitive psychology. I will proceed by briefly discussing each account and finish by commenting on the merits and pitfalls of the psychological approach as a whole.

Cartwright on Compassion

David Cartwright is perhaps the most qualified critic of Schopenhauer's theory of compassion. He has written several academic articles on Schopenhauer's moral philosophy as well as the preface to the new edition of *On the Basis of Morality*. One of Cartwright's earliest academic articles, "Compassion"[49], is a critical assessment of Schopenhauer's theory of compassion. This article serves as a good point to begin the examination the psychological conception since this is the focus of the criticism that Cartwright raises in opposition to Schopenhauer.

Over all, Cartwright is supportive of Schopenhauer's critical and positive projects. However, he sees Schopenhauer's metaphysical conception of compassion as being both unnecessarily complicated and slightly dated. Cartwright believes that Schopenhauer's model can be revised if we were to amend the foundational explanation Schopenhauer provides with a more contemporary psychologically reductive explanation. Of course, this new explanation would also be in line with several other contemporary conceptions of compassion to be discussed shortly.

The systematic nature of *World as Will and Representation* and the inter-relations of epistemic, aesthetic, and moral realms, means that Schopenhauer's system cannot be easily 'tinkered' with. Cartwright, however, seizes the opportunity to reintroduce an idea that Schopenhauer dismisses out of hand. In the previous chapter, we discussed Schopenhauer's curious choice to criticise the work of an obscure Italian philosopher Cassina as his final word on the impossibility of psychology serving as the ground of compassion. This non-argument leaves open the door that perhaps it was simply Cassina's treatment of the topic that Schopenhauer did not like. However this explanation does not seem realistic, as Schopenhauer seems to believe that he has done away with all arguments of this type rather than this particular example. Perhaps his cause would have been buttressed by an additional commentary on the work of Hume or Smith, but these figures are conveniently overlooked.

This error leaves Cartwright free to re-introduce a non-metaphysical explanation for the phenomenon of compassion, one he feels will protect the theory from a seemingly obvious flaw which makes the theory seem both antiquated and

---

[49] Cartwright, David. "Compassion" in *Zeit der Ernte: Festschrift fur Artur Hubscher zum 85 Geburtstag* ed.Wolfgang Schirmacher (Stuttgart an Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1982)

metaphysically implausible. Cartwright begins his critique by constructing a detailed model of Schopenhauer's theory of compassion.

> A has compassion for B if and only if;
> i) A and B are sentient beings,
> ii) A apprehends that B is, or will be, suffering,
> iii) A participates immediately in B's suffering,
> iv) A feels grief or sorrow for B,
> v) A desires B's well-being because B is, or will be , suffering,
> vi) A is moved to do X for B, where X is some action aimed at relieving B's suffering (philanthropy) or A is moved not to do Y, where Y is an action A has planned to perform which would cause B's suffering (justice).[50]

Cartwright's main problem with the Schopenhauer's model begins with the third condition. There are two problems to be pulled from this condition, the first deals with the ontological claim Schopenhauer makes and the second deals with the limit that the condition of 'immediate participation'. Cartwright does not attack Schopenhauer's metaphysical picture[51] but suggests correctly that if one does not share these metaphysical beliefs, the account is not plausible. The criticism Cartwright does put forth questions the role that the 'immediate participation in another's suffering' would have to play if rest of Schopenhauer's model is to hold true.

> Besides difficulty explaining this phenomenon, it is also inconsistent with another important feature of Schopenhauer's model of compassion. Schopenhauer claims that we have compassion for the future or possible suffering we might cause others (justice). Future or possible sufferings are mental states that do not exist. If they do not exist, how can we have immediate participation in another's non-existent mental state? It does not make sense to speak of participating in something that does not exist.[52]

Cartwright is referring here to two distinct claims that Schopenhauer makes. The first is that compassion is the foundation of the virtue justice, the second that compassion is the foundation of what he calls the virtue of loving kindness. Cartwright believes that it is impossible, if compassion is the immediate participation in another's suffering, that it be responsible for the entire realm of just acts, especially acts which prevent a future injustice. Cartwright suggests that there is only one way in which Schopenhauer's model can both account for the foundational role of compassion in just actions and at the same time become manifest at times where no immediate participation with another's suffering is possible, i.e. if that suffering could be in the future. Cartwright suggests that Schopenhauer abandon the metaphysical account for a psychological one which has a foundation in the imagination rather than metaphysical participation.

---

[50] ibid. pg.63
[51] We recall that Schopenhauer's claim that the immediate participation in another's suffering is made possible through all sentient being's participation in a metaphysical unity. He claims that this is the only explanation for 'the great mystery of ethics'.
[52] Ibid. pg.67

> His model of compassion is sound if we reformulate the third condition in the following way: iii) A participates imaginatively in B's suffering. This reformulation of the third condition removes the need to explain the agent's participation in another's mental state metaphysically. The agent participates in the other's mental state by imagining how he or she would feel in the other's situation, or how he or she would feel in this situation if the agent had the recipient's history, personality, temperament, etc. This process would provide the agent with a good taste of how things are for others. This reformulation avoids the difficult of explaining how we can feel for the other's mental state in his or her person (as our own). Further, this also allows us to explain how we can have compassion for someone's future or possible mental states.[53]

Cartwright's proposal seems reasonable, if we can simply imagine how another feels, this might give us a sense as to when another might be suffering and how our action or non-action could prevent this. What Cartwright overlooks here, however, is that Schopenhauer already employs this picture to account for very same issues in his conception of justice. Schopenhauer is well aware that justice is traditionally grounded in the faculty of reason and additionally is aware of the temporal constraints of the immediate participation in another's suffering. The reason Schopenhauer posits compassion as the ground of justice is that the simple awareness of the suffering of another does not provide any motivation to relieve another's suffering. This does not mean that imagination has no role in moral philosophy. On the contrary, Schopenhauer claims that the virtue of justice is primarily the utilization of these faculties.

> For although principles and abstract knowledge are by no means the original source or first foundation of morality, they are nevertheless indispensable to a moral course of life: they are they are the receptacle or reservoir which stores the habit of the mind that has sprung from the font of all morality, a habit that does not flow at every moment, but when the occasion for its application arises, flows along the proper channel.[54]

In fact, it is the application of these faculties that separates the virtue of justice from the virtue of loving-kindness. Schopenhauer's concern in positing the metaphysical conception in both theories of justice and loving-kindness is that the immediate identification with another's suffering provides the moral incentive for action. If we recall, according to Schopenhauer's theory of causation, simply imagining or understanding another's distress is not sufficient cause to act for the remedy of that distress. With this proposed modification, it is clear that the integrity of Schopenhauer's system cannot be maintained. In fact, Cartwright admits as much,

> Although this reformulation would prevent Schopenhauer from tying his model of compassion to his metaphysics, I do not believe that compassion needs any metaphysical explanations. Nor do I think that Schopenhauer's arguments in this direction are successful. With this modification, I believe that Schopenhauer's model of compassion is sound and fully articulates the nature of compassion.[55]

---

[53] Ibid. pg.68
[54] BM, pg.150
[55] Cartwright, pg.68

In some respects, Cartwright's paper is disappointing. His commentary on Schopenhauer's theory basically can be summarized in one sentence, "I believe, as Schopenhauer, that compassion is important, but I disagree with all his characterizations of the emotion as well as his metaphysical foundation." In this sense, Cartwright's paper is paving the way for all other analytic, psychologically reductive accounts. As we will see, some credit is given to Schopenhauer for drawing attention to the long overlooked phenomenon of compassion; however, the substance of his work is cast aside in favour of a more 'modern' approach. As I explain the remaining accounts, I hope to create a detailed description of what the 'psychological' account entails and how it relates to the alternative ontological accounts.

Blum on Compassion

Of the four emotional theorists I consider, Lawrence Blum is the first to approach compassion in a paper length treatment. In "Compassion"[56], Blum suggests that a full understanding of compassion might serve as a foundation for an alternative approach to contemporary moral theories, particularly Kantian deontological approaches. Blum claims to be inspired by Schopenhauer's *On the Basis of Morality,* especially the central notion that compassion lies at the root of all moral action. His description of compassion, however, does not follow Schopenhauer's cue. Blum maintains that compassion is an emotion which is similar in kind to more commonplace emotions like anger, fear, love, etc. but with one a-typical characteristic. He believes that compassion exhibits an 'irreducible affective dimension', which I interpret as being an emotional basis for action.

Compassion has both objective and subjective criteria for Blum. The objective criteria consist of beliefs concerning the object of the emotion. The first of the objective criteria is that the object of the emotion must have the capacity to suffer. Although Blum refers specifically to persons, his critique might include higher animals for example, but not corporations or institutions. As well, the suffering must be of a serious nature, although the victim of the suffering might not recognize the sobriety of the situation. Blum uses the curious example of feeling compassion for a blind man who, despite his handicap, pursues an education, gets a job, has a family, etc. Blum claims that we can feel compassion for this man's infirmity even though he may not be experiencing suffering at the time or consistently dwelling on his handicap. According to Blum,

[56] Blum, Lawrence. "Compassion" in *Explaining Emotions* ed. Amelie Rorty.

> It is not necessary that the object of compassion be aware of his condition; he might be deceiving himself with regards to it. Nor, as is the case with the happy blind man, need he think of it as a substantial affliction, even if he aware of it as a deficiency.[57]

It is enough for Blum, apart from the object individual's actual suffering, that we can imagine what he might endure as a result of the blindness. This may seem to be an unusual claim, but it becomes clearer when we recognize the extent to which Blum relies on the role of imagination for the experience of compassion.

Although compassion is an appropriate response only to significant suffering, that does not mean there are not akin emotional responses to lesser forms of suffering, or similar emotional responses to positive feelings like joy and jubilation. This is a useful aspect of the emotional theory, i.e. emotions tend to share family resemblances with one another so distinguishing between kinds might only include identifying only one or two unique aspects. Hence, I can be sympathetic with the fact that you were caught in a traffic jam on the way to the movie, but not feel compassion for you. Likewise, I can share the joy with you on your graduation day, but not feel pity for you (unless I know something that you don't!) The fact that compassion can be distinguished from these other emotions is helpful to Blum in that he can attempt to identify the particular conditions that are morally relevant to his account.

The first relevant subjective condition of the compassionate person is the belief that the object of her compassion is suffering. This belief is essential, but certainly not sufficient for the experience of compassion. There are several examples where one can imagine the belief that another is suffering does not result in a compassionate response. The sadist, the journalist, the combatant all may recognize suffering in others and experience responses from indifference to pleasure at this knowledge. There is no simple source of compassion for Blum.

> Compassion is not a simple feeling-state but a complex emotional attitude toward another, characteristically involving imaginative dwelling on the condition of another person, and active regard for his good, a view of him as a fellow human being, and emotional responses of a certain degree of intensity.[58]

The role of imagination is key for Blum, for it establishes a form of identification with the sufferer but avoids several of the more 'problematic' notions of identification. The first problematic concern for Blum is a form of pathological identification where one cannot distinguish his own identity from that of the sufferer. This situation is problematic because true compassion for Blum requires that the subject/object distinction always remains intact. The second form of identity Blum finds questionable is the 'common experience' notion. This theory claims that identification can be realized in light of shared experiences. However, this theory is insufficient for compassion in that it is limited only to shared experience. Blum's example here is useful. He claims that we can feel

---

[57] ibid. Pg.230
[58] ibid. Pg.231

compassion for a friend who has lost a child in a fire, even though we have never experienced the same horrible fate. How compassion forms identification in such cases is through the imaginative reconstruction of the sufferer's lived experience. We can imagine, in light of the sufferer's beliefs, lifestyle, culture, etc. how this tragedy must profoundly impact on her life. For Blum, this imaginative reconstruction hypothesis is the only potential explanation that provides both a conception of identification and distinction the compassionate person must necessarily have. He also seems to believe this is the only psychologically viable theory that explains both the potential ebb and flow of compassion in ones life.

> ...as a matter of empirical fact, we often do come to understand someone's condition by imagining what our own reactions would be. So expanding our powers of imagination expands our capacity for compassion. And conversely, the limits of a person's capacities for imaginative reconstruction set limits on her capacity for compassion.[59]

Imagination seems to be the key working concept in Blum's picture of compassion; however the subject of compassion must have a further commitment towards the object for the emotion to manifest itself. The compassionate person must desire the good for the object of her compassion. This desire must be a pre-existing conceptual comportment, not simply a response to some urgent need. This comportment involves viewing another in a certain way. By this I mean having a general idea of what might be best for them or what might constitute a 'good life' for them. Compassion for the object is stimulated by the perceived absence of one of these primary needs. This 'hope for the good' can be individualized in terms of specific persons, i.e. my son Bob needs rehab, or directed at others who we are not intimately acquainted with, but who are still deprived of a feature of the 'good life' i.e. the Afghanis have no food this winter. In this sense, we all share some idea of the minimum requirements of what is necessary to live a good life and we may ascribe to more or less robust accounts[60]. This picture of a good life must also include a sense of shared humanity, i.e. that the constituents of a good life are shared by all people. This kinship creates a sense of potential shared suffering which Blum believes is an important aspect of compassion. For Blum, this is the main distinction between compassion and pity. We pity someone who is in a position we think we can never be in, i.e. the unwed mother, the drug addict, the compulsive gambler, etc. However untrue this distinction may seem, it allows for a feeling on condescension in pity that does not occur in compassion. In other words, the motto of compassion is "There but for the grace of God go I", while the motto of pity is "how sorry for him having fallen so low".

The final aspect of compassion mentioned by Blum is a lasting presence or duration. He believes that twinges of guilt, or slight distress may have the same feeling as compassion, but the have no temporal stability, they do not last. Compassion, because it is necessarily associated with action, must last long

---

[59] ibid. Pg.232

[60] Martha Nussbaum has created a controversial picture of the requirements of a good life in her 'capabilities' thesis which she has presented in many of her recent works.

enough to produce action. Potentially, its duration may be extinguished only by the cessation of the suffering of the individual or the expected relief resulting from the initiation of some compassionate action. Blum believes that compassion, therefore, does not count as an 'inclination' in the Kantian sense. Kant believed that morality cannot be based on moral inclinations, partially due to their flightiness and unreliability. Compassion must have both duration and commitment which transcend the scope of mood. In fact, Blum believes that compassion often acts 'contrary to one's moods and inclinations' indicating its autonomy from a simpler more transitive mental state.

So to summarize, for Blum, compassion requires first and foremost, the utilization of the faculty of imagination to create a sense of identification with the object of compassion. This identification is complimented with a desire for the objects good, plus a general concept of what accounts for the good life of the object. This concept must be universal, i.e. must apply to all people to avoid an attitude of condescension or pity for the sufferer. A final comment must be added in the form that Blum does not see compassion as being a moral panacea. He believes compassion can be harmful in several ways. First, he believes that compassion may cause the victim of suffering to concentrate exclusively on his plight or think that others around him only see him in terms of his plight. This raises an interesting question which I will consider at much greater length later on in this work. It is a question raised by the stoics, and reiterated through the history of philosophy. Often it takes the form of the inquiry "Can a good man be harmed?". The gist of the question inquires as to whether or not the goal of the good life is to become impervious to the inevitable suffering we experience in light of the transitional nature of our existential reality. Our friends and family die, we gain and lose material possessions, our health and well-being waxes and wanes and all these things combined cause us to suffer. The philosopher asks, what is the role of compassion in relief of this natural process? Many answer that compassion should not be nurtured as an aspect of character for it provides only temporary relief from suffering that stems from a much deeper reality. True relief from suffering, then, must be found in the transcendence of desire that lies at its root. Blum's warning does not probe this deeply, but it is a lesser form of this strong critique. It is enough for now to recognize this criticism and return to it later.

Compassion can also be misguided for Blum in the respect that we can misjudge a person's plight or the actual nature of her suffering all together. Because he believes that we must have a picture of what a good life consists of, we may also be mistaken as to the way in which an individual lacks the essential criteria of the good life, or in our very picture of the good life. In this regard, Blum believes that compassion must be guided by rational principles for these complicated judgements.

Snow on Compassion

In her paper "Compassion"[61], Nancy Snow responds to and expands on many aspects of Blum's work. Snow's conception of compassion has much in common with Blum's but she departs in an interesting way when she introduces an Aristotelian alternative to Blum's imagination theory of identification. Snow, like Blum, believes that compassion is an emotion and is akin to many other empathetic emotions. To differentiate between compassion and emotions like pity, grief, and sympathy, Snow suggests that belief plays a decisive role. She believes that these emotions can only be clearly differentiated from one another by appeal to belief. Compassion is different from pity, for example, in the respect that in pity one believes that the object of pity either deserves the fate they have suffered, or could not avoid it due to some weakness that the pitier does not share. This is similar to Blum's account of pity. Unlike Blum, however, Snow explains the distinction between compassion and pity differently. The experiential 'feeling' of pity and the 'feeling' of compassion are subjectively the same. However, the beliefs from which the feeling arises are different. She schematizes her theory in the following way:

> (1) Compassion, pity, sympathy, and grief are composites of beliefs and feelings;
>
> (2) There are beliefs that characteristically accompany each kind of emotion that distinguish it from every other kind; and
>
> (3) Some of these distinguishing beliefs are about the object that is the focus of the emotion.
>
> An implication of the thesis that the physiological states experienced by the person who feels the emotion are unidentifiable as feelings of compassion, grief, and so on, unless some reference is made to the beliefs of the individual who is experiencing the feelings. The feeling of pity, for example, is phenomenologically indistinguishable from that of compassion or grief, baring reference to beliefs. This is compatible with psychological studies about fear, anger, and euphoria.[62]

Snow believes that we can pity someone while keeping a safe emotional distance. Compassion, however, is literally 'suffering with' another. This suffering is not a matter of a unique emotional experience as interpreted via a belief about the other person. Pity can be distant because we believe that the person suffering occupies a position that we never could. Compassion requires the belief that we might suffer the same fate as another, hence the bridge of identity is gapped. According to Snow, this belief also facilitates the occurrence of 'benevolent desires' or the urge to relieve the other's suffering.

Snow claims that Aristotle shows an alternative, or perhaps a helpful addition, to Blum's 'imaginative dwelling' thesis. Aristotle claims that the belief in the

---

[61] Snow, Nancy. "Compassion". *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Volume 28, Number 3, July 1991

[62] ibid. pg. 196

potential to experience certain misfortunes is enough to evoke the experience of compassion. Another possibility is the experience of love, which is not imaginative per se, but may allow us to fell compassion for others even though we may not possibly be able to imagine what they suffer. Snow suggests the example of a drug addict. A close family member of the addict may have no idea about the nature of drug addiction or what the daily aspects of a drug addict's life consist of. However, the love for the family member can be enough to feel deep compassion for the addict. Certainly it would not be easy to imagine the experience of a drug addict, but according to Snow,

> Why would this prevent them from suffering with him and desiring his recovery? Their love for their child could allow them to identify with his needs and wants and thus be sufficient to motivate a compassionate response without the aid of imagination. Yet, for Blum and others, if the parents cannot imaginatively reconstruct their child's experiences, their response cannot be compassion.[63]

It is important for Snow to show how there are possible alternative accounts to Blum's imaginative dwelling. She sees imagination as opening compassion up to the charge that it is mere 'irrational sentimentality'. Snow believes that by relegating the identification that is required for the experience of compassion to functions of imagination, the experience of compassion is opened up to charges of irrationality.

> What's to guarantee that these imaginings are no more than flights of fancy, with little or or basis in actual fact? An advantage of explaining compassionate identification in terms of beliefs is that, providing the beliefs are true or at least justified, this worry is circumvented.

In this regard, compassion is not understood as a simple emotional state like Kant's 'inclination', but a complex attitude towards the world that combines both believe and experience or in Snow's words it is "both cognitive and affective". The rationality of the experience of compassion can be understood in terms of the validity of the beliefs that form the basis for identifying with others. In order for these beliefs to be rational, they must be true, or at least justified. Snow develops a set of criteria for the rationality of compassion,

> (1) X must believe that X or someone close to X is vulnerable and, because of this vulnerability, is susceptible to misfortune;
> (2) X must believe that X or someone close to X is similar to Y in that X or someone close to X and Y are both vulnerable;
> (3) X must believe that Y's vulnerability played a part in occasioning Y's misfortune; and
> (4) X must believe that Y's misfortune is serious.[64]

The fourth criterion is added to characterize the suffering or misfortune as something worth a compassionate response. Again, this remark is similar to Blum's belief that compassion is a response to serious situations, and that one

---

[63] ibid. pg 197
[64] ibid. pg. 198

ought not to have compassion for every small inconvenience that one of our fellow's experiences.[65]

Snow seems to move beyond Blum here in one important respect. If we recall, Blum insists that compassion is not in itself adequate for a guide to action. He claims that it must be used in combination with knowledge and understanding in order for it to truly inform our decisions. Snow wishes to incorporate these epistemic aspects together with the affective aspect to form a greater conception of compassion. One interesting aspect of Snow's account is that she seems to use examples of identification on one particular level which distinguishes groups of people from a greater whole. Her explanation for this would be as follows: a 'c-feeler' believes that a sufferer and she share the same quality that, when acted on, would cause both of them to suffer. Of course, in this case only the sufferer is enduring this event and subsequently, the c-feeler is feeling compassion. If the feeling is rational, then the belief through which the c-feeler and the sufferer are connected, is justified. Snow believes that the particular means by which one suffers is not necessary for the identification. For example, I am not likely to be bombed by a war-plane anytime soon; however, according to Snow, I can feel compassion for victims of bombings because we share a certain vulnerability, that is, the vulnerability to be harmed by bombs. She believes that the belief in shared vulnerability is enough to make a compassionate response rational. While she seems to want to maintain a certain 'narrowness' in identification (she mentions Aristotle's and Hume's observation that we are most compassionate to those like us) she does use a very wide criteria for identification. Are we not all vulnerable to some aspect of fate or consequence? Indeed we are. Snow seems to be faced with the problem that her criteria for the rationality of compassion is too wide. The 'imaginative dwelling' in this regard could make a brief comeback to explain how we narrow the field of whom we experience compassion towards. Although I want to avoid making critical remarks at this time, it seems that Snow's 'belief' theory lacks a certain element of intentionality that explains the anecdotal nature of the experience of compassion in everyday life. It is true that I believe I am vulnerable in the same way that all sentient beings are, however, I do not feel compassion constantly for them. Snow's conception fails to explain why in this respect.

---

[65] As an aside, I find this legitimization of suffering approach to be very interesting and I will take it up in greater detail later. For now I would lie to draw attention to the fact that, although this statement may seem trivial, I believe it may cause some serious problems when pressed by an opponent of compassion. A objector in a stoic frame of mind might suggest that all suffering stems from the same source (desire, attachments, etc.) and suffering, if it is an evil, is surely bad because it is experienced and lived. This fact seems quite indifferent to the pedigree of the suffering itself. Therefore, if compassion is an appropriate response to suffering, then all suffering must be legitimate, not only suffering that is judged 'serious'. For example, I might suffer a great deal as a result of not being elected to the U of A cheerleading squad. You on the other hand, may suffer the death of a close friend. Now if we seem to manifest the same suffering, who is rightly the recipient of a third party's compassion, and why?

Nussbaum on Compassion

In her book *Upheavals of Thought*, Martha Nussbaum argues that emotions must be taken seriously as integral aspects of our cognitive and moral lives. Although her effort seems to be neo-Aristotelian, she utilizes key modern literary figures to emphasise emotions' role in navigating the course of a good life. The key emotion she cites in contributing to a moral life is compassion. The conception of compassion that Nussbaum formulates is perhaps the most robust in the camp I refer to as the 'emotive theorists'. She develops a very clear picture of emotion while entertaining several challenging alternative views, including both the work of Snow and Blum. Her book certainly deserves much attention and I will begin here by examining her section entitled "The Cognitive Structure of Compassion".

In this section Nussbaum develops her account of the nature of compassion and the criteria required to evoke and maintain the emotion. Aristotle's account of *elleos* and *oiktos* serves as a starting point for Nussbaum. She claims that Aristotle is the first to give a proper systematic account of compassion, as earlier commentators like Plato and Homer do not do the emotion justice for one reason or another. Nussbaum follows Aristotle's picture closely but does depart on several occasions where she feels it necessary to expand on or take issue with one of his claims.

Aristotle develops his theory of compassion in his work the *Rhetoric*. His intention seems to involve instructing potential rhetoriticians on the proper techniques for invoking or suppressing the experience of compassion in the listener. To this end, Aristotle recognizes three cognitive requirements necessary for the experience of compassion. Each of the three conditions is necessary and all of them sufficient for the experience of compassion, which Aristotle refers to as a "pain at the misfortune one believes to have befallen another". I will follow Nussbaum's discussion of the three criteria as she develops her account.

The first requirement will seem familiar in recalling the previous accounts that we considered. It has to do primarily with the belief that a victim's suffering is serious enough to warrant a compassionate response. Nussbaum justifies this requirement by appealing to our intuitions concerning the matter.

> We do not go around pitying someone who has lost a trivial item, such as a toothbrush or a paper clip, or even an important item that is readily replaceable. In fact, internal to our emotional response itself is the judgement that what is at issue is indeed serious—has 'size' as Aristotle puts it (1386a6-13).[66]

This is an interesting observation, like Snow, Nussbaum wishes to incorporate rational criteria into her account, not of the validity of compassion, but into the very experience of the emotion itself. This seems to be a questionable step that

---

[66] Nussbaum, M. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. pg. 306.

will require more discussion later on, but for now it is enough to note this interesting proposal.

Nussbaum seems content to draw on a large set of occasions for compassion. These include the potential list of misfortunes as accounted by Aristotle, as well as several modern inclusions such as infidelity, homelessness, victims of war, etc. In appealing to the work of Candice Clarke, who investigates several instances of appeals to compassion in American society and comparing these to Aristotle's list, Nussbaum wished to establish a 'cross-cultural' set of values whose potential degradation count for serious candidates for compassion.[67] This universality of this list seems to be important in establishing the intuitive support for the 'size' requirement. If it can be shown that 'size matters' in some cross cultural way in the extension of sympathy to others, it becomes easier to establish the legitimacy of introducing other criteria to legitimize a compassionate response.

Nussbaum introduces an interesting example to discuss this point. She proposes two cases: The first is the case of a Roman nobleman who discovers he will not receive his case of peacock's tongues for his dinner party. He weeps bitterly at the thought of his ruined party and implores his friend to feel compassion for his plight; his friend does not. The second case is that of an Indian peasant woman who suffers from chronic malnutrition and lacks any education. Although this woman may not feel that she is suffering, mostly because she has never experienced good health and believes that as a woman in her caste she is not entitled to an education, workers from a locally operated NGO feel great compassion for her plight. Nussbaum uses these two examples to demonstrate the different ways our judgements about the severity of our own suffering can go wrong. In both cases the rationality of the perspectives is called into question. The Roman has clearly failed to judge the appropriate severity of his problem as has the peasant woman, but to the outside observer, the suffering, or lack of suffering, is qualified via an objective judgment of the dilemma faced. In Nussbaum's words,

> In short: Implicit in the emotion itself is a conception of human flourishing and the major predicaments of human life, the best one the onlooker is able to form.[68]

Again, Nussbaum runs together the experience of the emotion and the judgment of its validity. The examples used seem to make it clear that in both situations the compassion feelers make the correct judgments; however, the results of the two scenarios do not prove that the experience of compassion is integrated with the rational criteria, only that the emotion can be effected by the criteria. I believe that this is an important distinction and that its relevance will come to light fully when we discuss normative approaches to compassion.

---

[67] This attempt ties nicely into her work on the 'capabilities' that has been the focus of Nussbaum's most recent books and is again featured prominently in this work.
[68] ibid. Pg.310

Nussbaum refers to the rational approach to determining the size of suffering as 'intentional', meaning that the object of our compassion is interpreted as one who rightly or wrongly suffers, not one who is simply suffering. The intentional characterization may be completely incorrect, according to Nussbaum; it may be misinformed or fail to capture the reality of the situation. These mistakes may result in the lack or surplus of compassion for the object. The way we see the object, however, and how we feel about it, will depend on a greater picture of human well-being and how this object fares in the light of this picture. Nussbaum uses the example of a wind player who suffers from a minor lip inflammation. It is right to feel compassion for the musician, not due to the seemingly minor infirmity, but because of its implications for the player. The player, on the other hand, has no reason to feel compassion for me if I suffer from the same infirmity because of the far less dramatic impact it will have on my life. We feel compassion for the wind player in light of the fact that we believe that career ending injuries are serious and that the suffering that results is serious as well. My interpretation of the situation depends on my belief about the good life of a musician and how this injury will play out in terms of that belief.

The eudaimonistic judgment that we utilize to measure the seriousness of suffering can be interpreted as ideological or naturalistic. Nussbaum wishes to present a more objective, naturalistic picture which favors a picture of human good that is stable through time and across cultures[69]. Her attempt seems to provide a ground from which to urge the extension of compassion as a natural response to certain types of suffering. In a sense, this descriptive notion of compassion attempts to remove obstacles to this natural attunement to the suffering of others via rational arguments and appeals to universality of her conception of the good. The alternative view, i.e. the ideological view of human good, will fare for better or worse depending on what one wishes in a theory of compassion. By this I mean, Nussbaum's picture seems to have the most potential within the view that compassion is a natural response to certain individuals who suffer certain fates. It has appropriate and inappropriate manifestations and the nurturing of compassion should occur to the extent that we respond compassionately in situations. The ideological conception of human well-being can serve a more normative picture of compassion that might extend the emotion beyond natural kinship boundaries or even past Nussbaum's 'capabilities'. An example of the ideological conception might be philosophical, like stoicism, or political, like National Socialism, or religious, like Christianity or Buddhism. As you might guess, the adoption of any one of these ideological eudaimonistic conceptions will result in a unique conception of the role of compassion in light of how the theory dictates ones role in the response to the suffering of others. As well, these theories might be considered to be naturalistic as well as ideological in that the ideology appeals to the natural aspects on human existence, in Buddhism for example.

---

[69] This 'objectivity' of this view of course is called into question by many of Nussbaum's critics who claim that this is noting than a warmed over liberal view disguised as an empirical claim. Allison Jager is one example of such critic.

What is unclear at this point is whether or not Nussbaum can hold that this difference between naturalistic and ideological eudaimonism can be differentiated in the existential sense. In order for Nussbaum to claim that we are naturally inclined feel compassion if certain characteristics are in place, one of these being the judgment of seriousness in light of a conception of the good life, she must hold that we must first believe in the naturalistic explanation. What I mean by this is that her appeal to naturalism or the universality of 'capabilities' does not appeal to how these values function or manifest themselves, rather, it appeals to our belief in them and their universality. Nussbaum believes that they are universal in the sense that she can make a good argument for them, not that they are forever and always substantiated in our lived experience, or that we are constantly attuned to them. In this sense, Nussbaum is telling a story about the universality of her conception of value, not appealing to the function of the values themselves. If they cannot be shown to function at some more fundamental level as the motivators or facilitators of the experience of compassion, then they operate on the level of mere ideology the same as another ideological picture. The result of this is that the seriousness of compassion must be judged in terms of some ideology, whether it be Nussbaum's 'capabilities' or Hitler's 'master race'. Both appeal to the naturalistic picture, and intuitively one certainly seems to be more appealing than the other. However, neither have more of a functionally naturalistic foundation to appeal to. They both require that one believe the story and make a compassionate judgment accordingly.

In a very roundabout way, then, I wish to argue that the first component of compassion, that the suffering of an individual must be judged to be serious, depends on a greater picture of human flourishing. Nussbaum wants to claim that her picture of flourishing appeals to a universal, cross-cultural, conception of well-being that is a general aspect of human character. I wish to respond by saying, although this picture is intuitively appealing, it has no more explanatory or persuasive power that sets it apart from any other ideological picture of human flourishing. What both require is a commitment to the greater eudaimonistic picture. The results, in terms of compassion, are contingent on the will of the believer to rationally judge the validity of the suffering of another in light of these eudaimonistic criteria. Even after this preliminary introduction, it is clear that the issue of the judgment of the seriousness of suffering seems to be a complex problem that will require further treatment. I will return to it shortly.

The second cognitive element necessary for compassion, according to Nussbaum and Aristotle, concerns the potential attribution of fault to the victim. In order to feel compassion for the victim of suffering, we must feel that the victim suffers through no fault of their own. If the suffering is directly attributable to the actions or character of the victim, we tend not to feel compassion for them. This aspect does admit to one exception, that being, if one does incur suffering and one is directly responsible, we may still feel compassion for that individual if the suffering felt is somehow out of line or disproportionate with the mistake or

character flaw. For example, if I cross the street at a pedestrian cross-walk and am run down by a car, I may certainly be the object of compassion. If I simply walk out into traffic and receive a ticket from the police, this is not an occasion for compassion because my own stupidity is to blame for my misfortune. On the other hand, if I get caught jay-walking by the police and they saw my legs off as punishment, I may be a candidate for compassion. Even though the jay-walking was my own fault, the suffering resulting from my punishment was entirely disproportionate with the severity of my crime.

The fault of the individual, then, plays a significant role in how we fell about their suffering. The judgment of the fault of the individual is certainly not simple; there seems to be several personal and cultural variables at play. Nussbaum refers to Clarke's study of American attitudes towards sympathy in noting that Americans are more likely to feel sympathy for drug addicts and alcoholics, categorizing them as those who suffer from illness, but seem to feel less sympathy that Europeans for those who are unemployed or under-employed. This second judgment Nussbaum attributes to the American 'hard work equals prosperity' view. Again, there seems to be a strong element of judgment at work in Nussbaum's account which seems to have several contingencies to navigate in order to reach a rational assessment.

The third requirement for compassion is similar to aspects in both Blum's and Snow's accounts, that is, a necessary judgment of "similar possibilities". This means simply that we be able to imagine ourselves suffering the same predicament as others. For Aristotle, one who thinks oneself beyond the capacity to suffer cannot feel compassion.

> Both Aristotle and Rousseau insist, then, that compassion requires acknowledgement that one has possibilities and vulnerabilities similar to those of the sufferer. One makes sense of the suffering by recognizing that one might oneself encounter such a reversal; one estimates its meaning in part by thinking what it would mean to encounter that oneself; and one sees oneself, in the process as one to whom such things might in fact happen.[70]

This suffering, for Aristotle, is not necessarily only my own potential suffering, but the potential suffering of my family and loved ones as well. Insofar as one cannot imagine oneself suffering the same fate as another, one is limited in the potential compassion to extend. This view presents various potential problems created by distinctions in class and culture, especially where these considerations prevent one from empathizing with the suffering of another's lot in life that is substantially different from one's own. It also requires a certain imaginative process that may or may not be readily available.

Nussbaum branches off from Aristotle here by claiming that the judgment of similar possibilities is not precisely what is at work in the manifestation of compassion, but rather, the judgment of the prevention of human flourishing in

---

[70] ibid. Pg.316

general. Even though Aristotle leaves open the potential to feel compassion for those we cannot relate to by suggesting perhaps that our loved ones might relate to them, Nussbaum feels that the suffering we relate to comes from the identification of the prevention of another's possible flourishing. Her view is wider in the sense that I do not have to imagine particular scenarios in which others suffer, i.e. what it is like to be caught in a bear trap, or have an abortion, but I can empathize with being thwarted in an attempt to realize my pursuit of a full life i.e. being immobilized against my will, or suffering psychological trauma that interrupts my education. This view is perhaps more cerebral than Aristotle's (it requires understanding a eudaimonistic picture of well-being) but it allows for a broader understanding of suffering not conceived of as relation to particular unique instantiations, but rather as a prevention of the fulfillment of a life goal.

Nussbaum's departure from Aristotle's picture prompts her to reflect on the differences between the two potential accounts. She sees Aristotle's account as being unnecessarily restrictive in that it does not allow for the extension of consideration in cases where social, class, gender inequities exist to the extent that they diminish one's ability to identify with another. In one sense, her notion of identification is wider in that it deals with a more general picture of suffering. She uses this opportunity, however, to question a further potential problem with the imaginative account. Nussbaum questions the necessity of a person or even a god's capacity to suffer in order to feel compassion. If compassion is god-like, as it is in the Christian tradition, how can a being who cannot suffer, feel compassion? In the Greek tradition, the gods are often portrayed as being particularly obtuse when human suffering is concerned. Much of this indifference is passed down through Greek philosophy in the form of Stoicism, Platonism, and Epicureanism. These schools generally held that the perfected individual need not harbor or nourish compassion, nor did they require it from others. This had to do to a great extend with the belief that a good man cannot be harmed and is impervious in all ways to incidental harms fate presented to them. Nussbaum asks, if outlook is a characteristic of human perfection, what room is left for the development of compassion, indeed, how can compassion be a characteristic of a divine being, a thing totally free from all imperfection and harm?

Even modern religions have aesthetic practices which would seem to cultivate similar stoic characteristics. The Buddhist bodhisattva is a being free from desire and hence suffering, however, the bodhisattva is also a being of endless compassion. Clearly Aristotle's account of compassion could only trivially explain this seeming paradox; can Nussbaum's do better? She believes that the question revolves primarily around the "eudaimonistic character of the emotions". If a person is to feel compassion, she must make another's well-being part of her own,

> Similarly, in order for compassion to be present, the person must consider the suffering of another as a significant part of his or her own scheme of goals and ends. She must take that person's ill as affecting her own flourishing. In effect, she must make herself vulnerable in the person of another. It is that *eudaimonistic judgment*, not the judgment

> of similar possibilities, that seems to be a necessary constituent of compassion. For that judgment to occur, it is not strictly necessary that she focus on the other person's relation to herself.[71]

While Nussbaum wishes to emphasize this eudaimonistic aspect of judging the welfare of others, she is careful not to stay too far from Aristotle's original picture. Although she does not consider the judgment of similar possibility to be necessary for compassion, she does claim that its potential to act an "indispensable epistemic requirement" cannot be underestimated in the identification of suffering in others. Her own picture, if not supplemented with Aristotle's, results in a more radically disassociated conception of compassion. The notion of feeling compassion for the failure of a fulfilled life plan seems to extend potentially, and subsequently trivially, to every individual in one's moral sphere. Granted that the second two requirements for compassion may not necessarily be present, Nussbaum's third requirement does seem fairly limitless, especially in light of her wide-ranging 'capabilities' conception of the good life. I might suggest here that, although her eudaimonistic requirement does have some explanatory power that Aristotle's does not, i.e. the compassion of God, gods, bodhisattvas, etc., it does not function as well as Aristotle's for the consideration of ordinary compassionate events. This does not mean it is not essential, for it is in a rich conception of compassion. Rather, I simply maintain it is not as essential, not does it take the place of, the judgment of similarity account. In fact, later on I will suggest a judgment of similarity account that, I suggest, will fulfill both functions.

Schopenhauer on the Psychological Accounts

As I have previously mentioned, it is difficult to discuss Schopenhauer's actual response to the psychological conception of compassion. He responds to an Italian philosopher Cassina in *On the Basis of Morality*, but the substance of the response is all too brief, criticizing Cassina's suggestion that compassion is a faulty imaginative reaction where we believe another's suffering to be our own. It is not clear even if the criticism of Cassina is addressed to the imagination thesis as a whole or simply to just this one formulation. We must conclude however, that even thought Schopenhauer never explicitly states it, his dismissal of the psychological conception of compassion is categorical. I believe this the case because he does forsake the more empirical psychological conception in favour of his metaphysical picture without considering alternative psychological accounts like Hume's or Smith's.

There is one clear reason why he might categorically deny the possibility of imagination being responsible for compassion. Although Schopenhauer believes that compassion is the foundation of morality, his also believes that the manifestation of true compassion is rare. Certainly if we have a healthy imagination, and we have the opportunity to live in a community with others, we

---

[71] ibid. Pg. 319

have ample opportunity always and everywhere to witness the misfortunes of others. If this is the case, we should also have the opportunity to imagine how others feel and often suffer. If compassion were simply a matter of imagination, we would expect to see true compassionate responses more often than not to the suffering of others. Since, according to Schopenhauer, this is clearly not the case, there must be something else going on to mediate the outflow of compassion. This 'something else' is precisely the aspect that sets the different psychological accounts of compassion apart from one another.

Blum claims that a limiting factor on the manifestation of compassion in one's life is the potential to utilize the capacity for imaginative reconstruction. Any potential inability in this respect can limit the extent to which we can 'feel' the emotions of another. The greatest barrier in Blum's case, however, is the extent to which we desire the good for another. This desire, for Blum, is not an immediate response to a situation but rather a long term attitude that is manifest as an aspect of character. I must construct a view of others in that I have a conception of what a good life might be for them and what events or circumstances might prevent them from fulfilling that life. Blum extends this to become a universal picture by claiming that this good life must involve a sense of shared humanity. In this sense, the good life is a natural picture extended to humans as humans in light of universal biological and social needs and desires.

Schopenhauer would certainly question Blum's conception of compassion in two ways. This first would be to re-state the general point concerning the absence of compassion. Is it really the case that the overwhelming absence of compassion is due to an inability to imaginatively reconstruct the circumstances of another? Although, the criteria one might use to settle this question are unclear, I do not believe that the burden of proof would lie with Schopenhauer. It is certainly the case that imagination is important for compassion, the lack of compassion in society is certainly not absent due to an inability of people to imagine how another might feel in a given situation. In fact, one might argue that society requires a certain amount of imaginative empathy to function period regardless of the moral value of the empathizing. To say that a possible cognitive deficiency is to blame seems unrealistic.

Schopenhauer might also take Blum to task on supposing that any rationally formed belief is enough to motivate a moral response. I might well indeed have an informed picture on what counts as human flourishing, perhaps I am indeed an expert on the subject, a sociologist or social psychologist for instance. For Schopenhauer, this knowledge does not in any way explain why I should choose to help another or make their will my own. In fact, this intimate understanding of another might serve the torturer or sadist as well as one who might extend compassion. For Schopenhauer, in a social and a biological sense, *reason has evolved as a tool to serve the will*. In this sense, it does not matter if my beliefs about another are justified and true, if I cannot subjugate my will, the understanding of another is of no moral consequence.

Snow follows Blum in believing that imagination is an important aspect for developing compassion. However, it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition. In fact, she believes that simply positing imagination as a source of compassion results in the charge that compassion is an irrational sentiment. It is interesting that contrary to Schopenhauer, Snow believes that compassion must have a firmer ground in rationality than Blum has provided. What Snow suggests follows Aristotle's criteria for compassion. Aristotle claims that we do not necessarily need to imagine the particular suffering of another but rather we must understand the fact that we are all susceptible to harm in a very similar way regardless of the specific form of harm we are exposed to. It is this belief, this shared vulnerability that allows for the manifestation of compassion outside the context of imagination. Snow believes that this added component can supplement the imaginative account and help it to avoid the charge of 'sentimentality', however it does nothing to answer Schopenhauer's criticism. If we believe for a moment that the understanding of a shared vulnerability can serve to manifest compassion, then this seems to widen even further the potential for this emotion. If this is the case, why do I not feel an overwhelming compassion for all sentient beings at all times in light of our common vulnerabilities? Snow, like Blum, in an attempt to develop a coherent account that encompasses all occurrences of compassion, fail to focus on the question of its actual presence, or lack thereof.

Like Snow, Blum, and Aristotle, Nussbaum believes that compassion should not be felt for suffering that is not 'serious'. This requisite legitimacy of suffering is an important character of compassion for all the psychological theorists. This question is interesting because the judgment concerning the seriousness of suffering always revolves around what criteria one chooses to determine whether one is suffering legitimately or suffering in vain. More important, for Nussbaum, is that the judgment be implicit in the experience of compassion. As we mentioned, Nussbaum has her own conception of the good life which she has laid out in several forms. She believes that we must create a eudaimonistic conception of life from which we judge the legitimacy of suffering and respond appropriately. Recall the example of the Roman deprived of his peacock tongue and the Indian peasant deprived of an education and healthcare. Regardless of the outward manifestation of suffering in both examples, Nussbaum feels that the suffering of the Roman does not warrant compassion because he is in no way deprived of any relevant component of a good life. On the other hand, despite the outward lack of suffering on the Indian peasant's part, she is certainly a candidate for compassion as a result of her being denied basic human rights.

In order to include a eudaimonistic conception as criteria for compassion, it is necessary to develop rational criteria from which we judge the legitimacy of suffering. From an explanatory perspective, this is good because it answers the question Schopenhauer asks, "What can account for the absence of compassion in the world?" If we create systems of beliefs that qualify the experience of compassion, we can suppress the emotion or sublimate it or perhaps not feel it at

all. A corrupt eudaimonistic perspective or even the failure to conceive of one, might explain any sort of atrocity imaginable. It also might explain the radical, almost schizophrenic treatment of different people in one's life. If I believe that panhandlers ought to work, I may never be moved to give them money. If I believe that Central American peasants are communists, I may not be moved if their villages are destroyed or they are tortured. This view is certainly not out of the realm of common sense, and is most likely a common experience in everyone's life. Interestingly, some of the most touching moral tales have to do with emotions like compassion and love overwhelming previously held beliefs that were responsible for the ill treatment of others.

For Nussbaum, part of living a good life is adopting a rational, universal system of values and judging the experiences of others in terms of one's own eudaimonistic perspective. Of course there is significant controversy over her particular formulation as one might well imagine, but the principle itself is what is of interest here. What seems to be at stake is a kind of philosophical repression. The psychological proponents seem to be worried about an unchained compassion overwhelming the senses of individuals, leaving them to indiscriminately emote here and there. The struggle to develop a universal criterion for compassion seems to want to take advantage of the powerful 'objective' nature of reason to discriminately judge who warrants the emotion. However, in the attempt to extend compassion universally, one must ask the question "why extend compassion in light of a common vulnerability, and not simply in light of suffering in general?"

I believe that Schopenhauer would respond in this way: If reason is left to first judge the legitimacy of suffering then the manifestation of compassion could never occur. Since reason is a slave to the will, it can never provide reasons to feel compassion. If the emotional response of the individual is interrupted by a rational process, compassion is stillborn. Not that Schopenhauer is an advocate of the universal pity of those who suffer needlessly. He would claim, however, that to mediate compassion is to kill it. Compassion is manifest spontaneously through the immediate identification of suffering in others. If this process is not allowed to proceed via a 'hardening of the heart', it will never occur. A more likely response on Schopenhauer's part is to suggest as the Buddhists do, that compassion and wisdom (reason) work together but in independent manifestations. Compassion is the source of morality in the sense that it provides us reasons and means to transcend one's will. Reason, for Schopenhauer, is sober secondary reflection on our feelings and desires. To combine reason into an account of compassion is to cripple it, to take away its efficacy. The question then is can a psychological account of compassion survive without a rational criterion for the legitimacy of suffering?

Chapter 4: Ontological Conceptions of Compassion

A Christian Conception of Compassion

You may call God love; you may call God goodness; but the best name for God is compassion.

Meister Eckhart

To Christian faith at this moment the voice of diatribe appears changed for the body of the Lord, who offered himself for the redemption of the world, and in this chalice of wine is transformed into the blood that was the price of salvation. May this body immolated and this blood sacrificed for humans nourish us also, so that we may give our body and our blood to suffering and pain—like Christ, not for self, but to bring about justice and peace for people.

Last words of Archbishop Oscar Romero

To begin with I wish to qualify the title of this section. I call the section *A* Christian Conception rather than *The* Christian Conception for an important reason. As Matthew Fox points out in his work *A Spirituality Named Compassion*, compassion has had a mixed history in the Christian church, starting as a central concept in interpretation and prophesy and suffering a marginalization in the Middle Ages, suffering the reduction to a merely sentimental role. In this way, the role of compassion has moved from a central to a marginal one over the history of the church. In the twentieth century, however, a new voice of compassion appeared. This was a voice of a new theology, a theology grounded in the suffering of the poor. This new 'theology of liberation' grounded its response to the injustice of the first world to the third, in terms of the twofold nature of compassion. First, the *identification* with those who suffer, and secondly, the heartfelt effort to relieve that suffering. Since this new tradition in Christianity draws so much on compassion, I will take advantage of the literature revolving around our topic rather than 'pulling out' an interpretation from the historical canon. Of course, I will not exclude Christian writers outside the liberation tradition. Compassion has also been a key concept in many mystical, as well as existential accounts of the Christian experience. I will attempt to include both of these as well.

Fox on Compassion

In chapter one, I discussed the various etymological roots of the concept of compassion. If we recall, the view of compassion in the Western Tradition has been shaped by the Greek conceptions of *splagchnizomai* and *eleeo,* as well as the Hebrew notions of *racham* and *hesed.* More important than the meanings of these words, however, is the role these conceptions play in understanding the role of compassion in contemporary religious thought. For those who wish to place compassion at the centre of a theology, it is essential to show how compassion functions in scripture and what, if any, theological significance can be placed on the manifestation of compassion in the lives of the religious.

Matthew Fox is a spiritual theologian by training and was for a long while a Catholic priest in the Dominican Order. He is currently working on the incorporation of spiritual theology with an environmental and feminist perspective. Fox begins his book *Compassion* with a commentary on the historical relegation of compassion to a notion of mere sentimentality. When he began his project on compassion, only one of fourteen Christian theological encyclopedias had an entry on compassion[72]. This entry, according to Fox, "...reveals what happened to compassion in its exile in the West. In one word, it has turned into sentimentalism, into "emoting with Mary at the foot of the cross" as the article explains it"[73]. Why does Fox see a sentimental interpretation of compassion as problematic? Fox primarily seems to be concerned with the potential of compassion as a ground for action. As he later explains, compassion is primarily tied into conceptions of social justice. The aspect of compassion that ties the recognition of suffering to the desire to remedy the suffering is fundamental. The sentimental portrayal of compassion, in this sense, severs this relationship. Fox claims,

> Sentimentalism is a very powerful energy. Anne Douglas, in her monumental study of sentimentalism in modern culture, defines it as the "political sense obfuscated or gone rancid...(that)never existed except in tandem with failed political consciousness". Thus sentimentalism is not only a block to social justice and a thorn in the side of love-justice—it is in fact their opposite.[74]

Fox sees the sentimentalization of compassion as one of several attacks on authentic compassion throughout recent history. He also claims that this perverse interpretation of compassion has lent to the call for 'Christian pity' to be utterly rejected. The most famous call comes from Nietzsche in his many attacks on the so-called ethics of pity. Even if his interpretation of Schopenhauer's *Mitleid* is questionable, his criticism of the sentimentalized pity is not far from the mark.

> Through pity (*Mitleid*), suffering itself becomes infectious; in certain circumstances it may lead to a total loss of life and vital energy which is absurdly out of proportion to the

---

[72] While all four Jewish encyclopedias had substantial entries for compassion.
[73] Fox, pg.5
[74] Fox, pg.6

> magnitude of the cause (-the cause of the death of the Nazarene). This depressing and infectious instinct thwarts those instincts which aim at the preservation and enhancement of the value of life; by multiplying misery quite as much as by preserving all that is miserable it is the principle agent in promoting decadence.[75]

Nietzsche's criticism is directed towards the conception of compassion or pity that Fox is also adamantly opposed to. The function of compassion is not to spread misery in the infectious, sentimental sense. He sees compassion, in the biblical sense, serving as the foundation for justice and action.

> Biblical compassion resists the sentimentalizing of compassion. In biblical spirituality the works of mercy are works and the word for compassion in the bible is more often employed as a verb that as a noun or an adjective. Compassion is about doing and relieving the pain of others, not merely emoting about it.[76]

Fox uses the first epistle of John as an example of this,

> But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels [of compassion] from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?
>
> My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.(1 Jo 3:17-18)

The fault of the sentimental conception of compassion is that it over-emphasizes one aspect of compassion while negating the essential importance of another. We might indeed suffer in the knowledge that another suffers. However, the compassionate response is not found in the dwelling in and proliferation of suffering. Rather, the compassionate response is just that, a response to suffering. Fox believes, like Schopenhauer, that it is compassion's role as motivator that underlies its moral significance. However, Fox is not a careful reader of Schopenhauer. He believes, as does Scheler, that Schopenhauer is preoccupied with suffering and does not appreciate the full experience of compassion.[77]

Fox's project continues with a clear list of aspects which define true compassion. We have already discussed the importance of understanding compassion as being distinct from pity and sentimentality. Now Fox turns to grounding his positive conception in scripture. We have already seen an example from the New Testament of the importance of works. Fox believes this tradition begins much earlier in the Old Testament and is carries into the new. He lists the fourteen traditional works of mercy found in the Old Testament. They include: Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, breaking unjust fetters, (Is. 58.6-8) giving drink to the thirsty, (Gen 24.18) visiting the sick, (2 Kings 8.29) and burying the dead (1 Sam.31.11). According to Fox,

---

[75] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Antichrist*. Pg. 131

[76] Fox, pg.7

[77] Unfortunately, Fox is merely parroting Scheler's attack on Schopenhauer, and has no real insight of his own to contribute in this regard. I will settle the Schopenhauer/Scheler debate later on in this chapter.

> ...all these acts of mercy are acts indeed. Though they come from the heart and go to the heart, they are not restricted to sentiment or heartfelt emotions, however powerful. They all involve other people which is to say they are political activities.[78]

Fox sees Jesus of the New Testament as inheriting a tradition of compassion, of healing and of justice-making. The parable of the Good Samaritan is the first good example of the work of compassion. The Samaritan is not of a priestly caste, nor is he a member of the Galilean community proper. He has no political affiliations with the sufferer, nor is he the beneficiary of any kindness from any other group (Samaritans themselves being outcasts). But the Samaritan shows compassion, not be feeling sorry for the sufferer, but by helping him,

> But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion [on him],
> And went to [him], and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
>
> And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave [them] to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. (Lk.10.33-35)

It is the work of the Samaritan that Jesus hold in highest regard and his teaching ends with the instructions for his disciples to "go and do thou likewise". Jesus reiterates the six corporeal works of mercy in Matthews Gospel (25.34-46). Feeding the hungry, giving drink, visiting prisoners, clothing the naked, tending to the sick, and welcoming strangers are the *only* criteria mentioned for admission into the kingdom of heaven.

For Fox, compassion is the ground of action for Jesus,

> Compassion is giving and not only feeling for Jesus. Jesus' teaching on the works of compassion underlies the starting point of all compassion: namely, that I am not only I but we are one another. And he brings in still a new and deeper mystery: that we are also God. That God suffers as we suffer. That God is relieved as we relieve the pain in one another.[79]

Compassion in this regard cannot be understood without work. The role of compassion is to for the Christian according to Fox is to understand the relationship of our fellow human beings to us and in turn, the human relationship with God. This is reminiscent of Schopenhauer's picture of identification. However, Schopenhauer does not mention the role of God in the affair. At the same time, he does not exclude many religious authors from his examples of those who understand the moral dimensions of compassion.

---

[78] Ibid. pg.8
[79] Ibid. pg.10

Sobrino on Compassion

Jon Sobrino is a Spanish Jesuit and the only surviving member of the San Salvador Jesuit community massacred Nov.16, 1989. He is of the most prominent practitioners of liberation theology and hold chairs of theology at several universities. In a paper entitled "Compassion: The Shaping Principle of the Human and of the Christian", Sobrino begins to unfold his conception of compassion as it related to the ultimate nature of human being's relationships to God and to one another. He begins with a less than appealing commentary on the state of the world without compassion,

> There is a terrible injustice in today's world, one which, slowly or quickly, brings the great majority of humanity closer to death. And there is also a colossal cover-up of that death. Justice and truth, therefore, are fundamental and urgent demands, but they are also extremely difficult to meet, because, this world, moreover, is a pitiless world, with no interest in seeing the truth in events and or in finding a solution.
>
> In order to overcome this cruel reality, the world needs an all-encompassing and fundamental attitude which we will call compassion. This term—just as any other which attempts to describe fundamental realities—is an ambivalent one, in fact it is even dangerous and easily manipulated, and thus its intended meaning must be explained. However, we consider it a crucial term in accentuating the structural cruelty of the world we live in and in expressing what must be the fundamental attitude—the minimal, if you like, but historically maximal attitude—of believers and human beings.[80]

From the sobriety of this introduction, obviously Sobrino understands compassion, or at least the potential of compassion, to be more than simply an interesting emotion or a warm fellow feeling. This belief is shared with Fox who sees compassion at not only psychologically, but ontologically significant. What I mean by this is that both theologians feel that compassion is not simply a relation to suffering but a calling or destiny of human action. It is the authentic response of human beings to suffering in a world where true human nature is consistently attacked and undermined.

Although Sobrino believes that compassion is essential in all human response to injustice, he makes a strong case first of all for the ground of compassion in the Christian faith. In response to the many years of criticism that liberation theology was illegitimately attempting to mix politics and religion, Sobrino develops a careful response to show how compassion is the fundamental character of both God, Christ, and therefore Christians. What follows from this is that the Christian response to suffering and injustice is a response of compassion. Since authentic compassion necessarily involves attempting to relieve suffering and injustice, the role of the Christian is necessarily political. It is important to understand Sobrino's argument to fully appreciate how the ontological characterization of compassion unfolds and how fundamentally it can be immersed with the destiny of humanity.

---

[80] Sobrino, pg.1

Sobrino begins his theological/historical argument with a bold claim and a question about the traditional understanding of God's manifestation to the Hebrew people,

> What we would like to do here is to specify concretely, on the basis of the new testament—and from and for the current situation prevailing on our world—that fundamental truth, which is centered in John's proclamation "God is love" (1 John 4,8). What one must ask oneself is what type of love is at the origin and of the process of God's self-revelation. And that love is not just any kind of love, but rather a love which we should describe in terms of justice and liberation, and which we will analyze here as compassion.[81]

If knowledge of God cannot be reached by pure speculation, it is essential that the relationship of God to humanity be understood through God's revelation i.e. the timing and purpose of God's historical unveiling. Sobrino argues that the first manifestation of God, in his naming God's-self to the Hebrew people is through the action of liberating an oppressed people.

> The earliest creed of Israel in the Old Testament begins in the following manner: "I am Yahweh who brought you out of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 26,5-9) The identity of God is proclaimed through a historical action attributed to God by means of faith: the liberation of a people. What interests us most is the reason why God liberated Israel. Some believe—and we see this in the first Vatican instruction on liberation theology in 1984—that the reason was that God wished to create a people in order to form, later, a covenant with them such that the people would worship God alone. This way of understanding the Exodus, besides being exegetically incorrect, would also be considered egocentric (to use anthropomorphic terminology). ...In explaining the reason for God's manifestation, the Yahwist tradition says the following: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard the outcry against their slave masters. I have taken heed of their sufferings, and have come down to rescue them from the power of Egypt and to bring them up, out of that country into a fine, broad land..." (Exodus 3.7f) And the Elohist tradition formulated this in the following way: "The outcry of the Israelites has not yet reached me; yes, I have seen the brutality of the Egyptians towards them. Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh and you shall bring my people out of Egypt" (w. 9f).

Sobrino disputes what he considers to be a conservative and inaccurate interpretation of God's revelation for a more literal, historical interpretation. God becomes manifest to the Israelites as a response to their suffering. God's self proclamation is accompanied by action. The historical imprisonment of the Hebrews is not simply the occasion for God's self-revelation, but the reason for it. The important difference between the conservative and historical interpretations is that in the historical interpretation, God's manifestation does not require any other reason than the recognition and action to remedy the suffering of the Hebrew people. The conservative account requires an interesting, but purely speculative and questionable interpretation of God's will. Sobrino believes that the suffering of the Hebrews is the only event needed to explain God' reaction.

---

[81] Ibid. pg.2

For Sobrino, the significant structure of God's revelation can be summarized in three essential points:

> (a) God becomes manifest in and through the reaction to an action on the path of human beings who oppress others unjustly and make them victims;
> (b) That reaction consists of liberating the victims from such suffering; and,
> (c) Finally, it is motivated only by the suffering of the victims.

The ultimate importance of this principle is that it stands first and foremost at the chronological origin of God's manifestation, and that the principle stays active as God's nature and identity are shaped through God's historical relationship with the Hebrew people. To view this principle as a single occurrence, or a theological remnant that is replaced at a later date is a fundamental error for Sobrino. The compassion principle gives direction and content to the relationship of God to the Israelites in the Old Testament; their God is a God who reacts to their suffering and delivers them.

The New Testament witnesses the compassion principle at work through the resurrection of not simply Jesus the Christ, but Christ the crucified, the innocent man who was humiliated and unjustly executed.

> The specificity of the resurrection of Jesus is not simply that God managed to raise just any corpse, but rather that God raises up a just man unjustly slain, an innocent victim. And here we find the theological importance of the resurrection of Jesus. God raises up a victim and does so as a reaction to the action of human beings. This action is a response to the unjust and criminal action of human beings. For this reason, the resurrection of Jesus can be understood in an analogous fashion to the liberation of Egypt, as an act of compassion towards a victim, by means of which God becomes manifest.[82]

In this way, the two Testaments are bound together. God becomes known in God-self and through Christ as the God who relives the suffering of victims and does justice. That is not to say that this is the only reason God becomes manifest. Sobrino admits other important reasons such as the revelation of truth and the *telos* of human existence. But time and time again, the moral focus of the Testaments, by God's example and Christ's teaching[83] is that God is a God who responds to suffering and injustice.

It is not only in the works of God, but in the works of the historical Jesus that we see the compassion principle in play. Jesus' mission is described in (Acts 10,38) as "doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him". Jesus respond not only to physical, but spiritual suffering and works among the simplest, most downtrodden in the community. He consistently makes decisions which defy political and social status in defense of the downtrodden in society. His fate can also be seen as a consequence of his compassion.

---

[82] Ibid. pg.4
[83] The Parables of the Prodigal's Son and the Good Samaritan are perfect examples.

It is as important for Sobrino as it is for Fox that then compassion of Christ is not confused with a simple emotional or sentimental response to suffering. In the example of Christ healing on the Sabbath, he not only relieves the suffering of the crippled man, but challenges the representatives of the established order responsible for the persecution of the poor. It was this event that began the conspiracy to murder Jesus. Christ's compassion for victims leads directly to his own death, for compassion in this sense leads to confrontation with the persecutors of the suffering. It is a necessary, unavoidable political response.

> For Jesus, freedom is, above all, overcoming any restrictions in order to do good; in this case, transcending the law in order to heal the sick. That is to say, freedom is at the service of compassion and not the other way around. And from this standpoint we must understand "Jesus the free man" as the man of compassion from who nothing is an obstacle for doing good....
> As monstrous as it may seem, the world reacts against those who consistently and freely exercise compassion, against anyone who attempts to react in a saving way towards victims, precisely because they are victims. The (transcendental) correlation between compassion and victim necessarily leads to relating and confronting the compassionate with their tormentors. The correlation between compassion and victim simultaneously demands attacking the tormentors and forcing them to react in turning against the compassionate.[84]

The good deeds of Jesus were not, in themselves, grounds for his death. Ultimately it was the political challenge to the established social order that resulted in his crucifixion. For Sobrino, this is the ultimate expression of compassion. The integration of the immediate relief of suffering while keeping in mind the ultimate root of injustice and persecution.

> If there is no conflict and persecution, there is no true compassion; and inversely, the enduring exercise of compassion leads to conflict and persecution. It is not just rhetoric to say that Jesus was put to death because he exercised compassion in a consistent way. By offering the reign of God to (the) victims, he declared himself against the temple of Jerusalem and against the *pax romana*.[85]

Sobrino's picture of compassion is not sweet or inoffensive. It is dialectical and subsequently in opposition and offensive. In this respect, it is clear to see how Sobrino incorporates the principle of compassion with a theology of the poor and as well, how this picture can be considered so controversial to the conservative hierarchy of the church. Unfortunately, Sobrino has all too much first-hand knowledge of the dialectical unfolding of the principle of compassion. This is his understanding of the murder of his brothers and sisters including his friend Archbishop Oscar Romero. Jesus' fate is shared by those who speak truth to power and dare to defend the suffering of victims by questioning the authority of the powers that be.[86]

---

[84] Ibid. pg.8
[85] Ibid. pg.8
[86] There was a controversial moment after the presentation of this talk when Sobrino was asked to comment on Mother Teresa. Staying true to his commitments, he answered by saying the she was not compassionate in the fullest sense because she did not question the root of suffering of the

For Sobrino, Jesus' compassion is exemplified as both the foundation and ultimate end of his life. Nothing exists before the suffering of others, no commandment or rule, nor does anything exist after it. Compassion is described in the beatitudes as its own reward, where its practitioners are said to "live in joy". Jesus does not provide arguments why one ought to be compassionate as it is seen (etymologically and practically) as the authentic human condition. If we recall, the term *splagchna* refers to the entrails or guts of a person, his or her substance or what they 'really are'. The characters in the Testaments are often judged on the character of their hearts, hence 'hard-hearted' or 'good-hearted' or hearts of flesh and stone.

To conclude, it will be useful to draw what can be considered the philosophical account of compassion from Sobrino's lecture.

1. Compassion cannot be confused with the sentimental fellow-feeling or even so-called works of mercy for these actions can serve to "conceal the structural cause of human suffering, can distract attention from the necessary structural solutions, and can even justify those responsible for oppression".

2. Compassion is the reaction to overcome human suffering *simply because it exists*. Compassion has no reason or final cause or justification other than that. This compassion can manifest itself in different forms, in mercy, or justice.

3. Compassion is the exercise of defending victims, and in doing so, identifying and denouncing their tormentors. As a result, the compassionate are often made to suffer and often die. This is not the case in 'works of mercy'.

4. Compassion does not describe all that it is to be human, but most certainly shapes the other aspects of what it is to be human. In shaping one's individual destiny, compassion can be the source of joy even in the smallest victories. Compassion must inform all other roots of praxis, the aesthetic, the rational, and the ethical. It must reign in instrumental and reifying reason.

Sobrino sees compassion as being a fundamental choice faced by everyone in light of their own humanity. His existential framework is also the answer to the political dilemma of the global community.

---

poor she helped. As one might expect from a primarily Catholic audience, the response was not popular.

> Everyone, just because we are human, must walk in history, and we all meet up with beaten persons along the roadside. If we look them in the eye and dedicate our lives to saving them, the compassion-principle unites us all. But if we avoid them in order not to see them, then we have sullied the essence of what is human and the compassion-principle divides us.

Sobrino's compassion is an interesting combination of the political and the ethical, of the existential and the social. Perhaps the term combination is inaccurate here. As Sobrino sees the compassion-principle as essential to God and human nature, and the political as being an essential property of compassion, it is inaccurate to say that Sobrino combines these two supposedly distinct realms. What is more correct is to suggest that he dissolves a dualism between human nature and justice-making that is responsible, or allows to occur, grave injustices in the names of religion, politics, and human nature.

Merton on Compassion

Ironically, Thomas Merton gained his fame in an attempt to remove himself from the world. His autobiography, *The Seven Story Mountain*, was the account of his life as a young religious convert and monastic novitiate was a world-wide best seller. After gaining an unwelcome literary fame, Merton went on to write many books on the subjects that interested him most, monasticism, contemplation and prayer, and inter-religious dialogue. Apart from being a prolific writer, Merton was an active participant in the Catholic peace movement in the lead-up to the Vietnam war, a participation that resulted in an official silencing that prohibited him publishing any material having to do with war.[87] In 1968, after many years of writing about Eastern religion, Merton was allowed to attend an interfaith council in Bangkok. Here, after arriving via India where he had several discussions with the present Dali Lama, Merton was accidentally electrocuted.

Merton was a contemplative and self-described existentialist. His notion of compassion, consequently, deals with an inner search or longing for what he refers to as the true self. The 'true self' of Merton can be compared with many similar existential/religious distinctions. Schopenhauer's metaphysical/empirical distinction is first to mind, the no-self of Buddhism, the Atman of Hinduism, even Heidegger's authentic/inauthentic self is arguably created along the same lines.[88] What Merton is primarily concerned with is the existential ground of compassion, for he sees this as the foundation of truly moral action. In a very familiar voice, Merton decries the modern obsession with the material or 'false' self that he considers to be growing.

> Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And

[87] His war writing subsequently went underground and was copied and circulated within the movement.

[88] Although Heidegger himself was fonder of the Buddhist interpretation of his work.

> to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy. My false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside the reach of God's will and God's love—outside reality and outside life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion. We are not very good at recognizing illusions, least of all the ones we cherish about ourselves—the ones we are born with and which feed the roots of sin. For most people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist. A life devoted to the cult of this shadow is what is called a life of sin.[89]

The false self is the root of suffering and alienation for Merton. It is the source of bitterness and anguish, of alienation from oneself, others, and God. Merton at times flirts with Marxist critiques of materialism to demonstrate how the reification of material objects, among other things, contributes to sustaining the false self. The greatest danger of the identifying with the false self is the lack of control we have over its constituents. The false self is corrupt, unstable and ever changing. It is also ever threatened, and according to Merton, that is the root of our fear and subsequent willingness to commit violence. Our will and identity as manifested in the false self become our primary motivation. In accordance with Schopenhauer's notion of the will, we act towards our own selfish means as we see fit, and as the will of the false self is our only motivation, we fail to consider others apart from means to our own ends.

> No man who ignores the rights and needs of others can hope to walk in the light of contemplation, because his way has turned aside from truth, from compassion, and therefore from God. The obstacle is in our 'self', that is to say in the tenacious need to maintain our separate, external, egocentric will.[90]

Most of Merton's mature thinking was devoted to the role of contemplation as a means of understanding or realizing the true self. His own path towards this realization involved the monastic lifestyle. However even monasticism still had several entanglements Merton saw as barriers to his own spiritual fulfillment. These monastic obligations were lessened by the privilege granted to Merton to live as a hermit in a small cabin in the woods on monastery land. It was here that he could fully delve into the practice of contemplation, to experience the nature of the true self and fully understand his new relationship to the world.

> ...a man cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through the center into God unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself and give himself to other people in the purity of a selfless love.[91]

Merton recognized the apparent irony of his social commentary, the origin of which was far from society. This did not prevent him however from performing what he believed to be his true function as commentator. Merton believed strongly that the privilege of solitude afforded to him provided a unique perspective, especially in matters concerning peace and justice making, topics which he considered to have deep, spiritual roots. His help was most welcome, as well, by people who lived on 'the front lines'. Merton was forced by social

---

[89] Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation* Ibid. Pg.34
[90] Ibid. Pg. 64
[91] Ibid.

conscience to speak out in situations where he certainly understood the negative implications of his words on his order and himself. However, he refused to accept the role as non-offensive Catholic celebrity that was often forced on him. The implications of his spiritual inner-life had outward manifestations that no one, except possibly Merton, had expected. He could not live to see the tragedy of war repeated so soon after the Second World War took his own brother's life. Nor could he abide the racism and social injustice rampant in the United States. His response, however, was not one of violence or anger. It was a principled, disciplined response, but one that was unfamiliar to the time. Merton's response was one of compassion, drawn from a deep contemplative well.

> The witness to Merton's compassion can be most amply authenticated from his many writings. The expressions of it are profoundly beautiful at times. But he also gives a most powerful witness to what is the ground and root of true compassion, namely a keen awareness of our common humanity, our oneness in God and God's loving design upon us, a design that calls for a unity and becomes oneness in him. There is an instinct for compassion in every human. It can be lost under overlays of selfishness and self interest, as it was in the young Thomas Merton, or as one gives oneself to the pursuit of abstract ideals as did the young father Louis.[92]

Merton's compassion was rooted in his true self, the self realized through contemplation and prayer, the self that allows the experience of the shared humanity of all people. One of Merton's fondest correspondents at the time was a young Vietnamese monk named Thich Nhat Hanh. In a short essay entitled "Thich Nhat Hanh is my Brother", Merton announces his support and admiration for Nhat Hanh who at the same time was campaigning in the United States for peace in his homeland. Merton claim that his fraternity with Nhat Hanh stems from a shared spiritual outlook, formed by prayer and contemplation. This spiritual brotherhood, Merton claims, places him in a closer relationship to the monk than to many of his countrymen who share the same skin, the same language. Merton calls for a similar universal compassion to be the goal of everyone striving for peace and justice. This compassion, however, must be the result of an inward silence, an experience of identification, not the adherence to a command or blind obedience.

> True compassion, to be truly able to feel with another in all his joys and sorrows, flows only from love, a genuine love for the other. Universal compassion, an ability to feel with everyone in a personal way, can flow only from a deep love for all. Such a universal love is possible only in God. And it is only by deep existential prayer, contemplative prayer, that we can be so grounded in God that we can give ourselves in this universal love and come to exercise and live a universal compassion.[93]

Merton never failed to return to his silence. The more attention he attracted from the outside world, the more solitude he required to fashion his response to it. The response was generally demanding of his audience. Merton refused to engage in propagandizing or violent speech. His calls were always direct and sharp, but at the same time demanded as much from his advocates as from his opponents. This

---

[92] Pennington, Basil. *Thomas Merton—My Brother*. Pg.32
[93] Ibid. Pg.33

demand was based on his intimate awareness that the political must have its roots in the personal. Especially in volatile times, it is essential to cast off the ego which misleads and corrupts our intentions. The true self, for Merton, is the only source of peace.

> In a very real sense, he who practices non-violent resistance must commit himself not to the defense of his own interests or even those of a particular group: he must commit himself to the defense of objective truth and right and above all of *man*. His aim then is not simply to 'prevail' or to prove that he is right and the adversary wrong, or to make the adversary give in and yield what is demanded of him...For this very reason, as Gandhi saw, the full consistent practice of non-violence demands a solid metaphysical and religious basis both in being and in God. This comes *before* subjective and good intentions and sincerity.[94]

Here we see Merton's picture clearly blending into Schopenhauer's. Although Schopenhauer was not a Christian, he shares the same fundamental beliefs about the self that Merton represents here. However, the two differ in one important way. While Schopenhauer believes that compassion is a mystery, Merton believes that the development of compassion is possible through spiritual practice. Even admitting this difference, the two, as well as Sobrino, see the world in similar pessimistic tones. If there is hope for all three, it is hope in an existential form. The fate of humanity, subsequently, is not determined by nationalism or politics, but by concerned, conscientious action based on a strong spiritual foundation.

Merton believes in the potential of human salvation, as does Schopenhauer. For Merton, it is clear that the compassionate identification with others is a fundamental experience which exists first and foremost before the social, before the political. This fundamental nature becomes corrupted when we choose to enrich our egos, our false selves at the expense of truth, at the expense of justice. This 'life of sin' is common in all three Christian writers I have discussed. Sin is the enemy of compassion insofar as it corrupts our 'self'. When we reify this false self, our will dominates our action. We act as in response to the external nexus of this empirical self. It is only through the practice of contemplation, for Merton, that we begin to experience our true selves revealed.

Schopenhauer on Christianity

As one might expect from Nietzsche's mentor, Schopenhauer had an ambivalent relationship with Christianity, although he is certainly not a hostile to all its incarnations and influences as his one time disciple was. We often see Schopenhauer pressing a proto-Freudian argument that religions purpose simply fills a metaphysical longing for those not intelligent enough to actually understand the metaphysical implications of existence. We find Schopenhauer's frustrations more directed at so-called Christians, rather than at Christianity in theory.

---

[94] Merton, Thomas. *The Non-Violent Alternative*. Pg.208-9

> We therefore see that in the main, and for the great majority unable to devote themselves to thinking, religion fills very well the place of metaphysics in general, the need of which man feels to be imperative. They do this partly for the practical purpose as the guiding star of their action, as the public standard of integrity and virtue, as Kant admirably expresses it, partly as the indispensable consolation in the deepest sorrows of life.[95]

Schopenhauer was continually disgusted by the atrocities of war and cruelty perpetrated in the West. Although he did not believe, as Nietzsche did, that the essence of Christianity was responsible for these. He did believe that at its essence, Christianity was a legitimate response to the existential condition of human existence. Insofar as this was the case, Christians in principle, if not in practice, had a legitimate chance to experience salvation. Schopenhauer provides us with a unique reading of Christianity, one that is unconventional for certain, but interesting. He emphasizes the doctrine of original sin as being the essential saving aspect of Christianity. The doctrine of original sin allows Schopenhauer to categorize Christianity as fundamentally pessimistic. This is important because it corresponds with what he believes the actual human condition to be, i.e. a deep state of suffering and desire, unbroken except for momentary and fleeting instances of happiness.

> I cannot, as is generally done, put the fundamental difference in all religions in the question whether they are monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, or atheistic, but only in the question whether they are optimistic or pessimistic...The power by which Christianity was able to overcome first Judaism and then the Paganism of Greece and Rome, is to be found solely in its pessimism, in the confession that our condition is exceedingly sorrowful and sinful...[96]

Interestingly enough, one of Schopenhauer's most reviled figures in the history of philosophy is the monk Pelagius, whose work was considered heretical because it denied the doctrine of original sin. Although the Pelagian heresy is still alive and well in the West, Schopenhauer felt it surely deserved the fate it was dealt for it "seeks to reduce everything to trite and dull comprehensibility". The enigma of original sin, on the other hand, forces one, as a matter of existence rather than sinful living, to seek salvation through the renunciation of the will to live. No matter how one acts or lives, the fundamental truth of suffering is always manifest in life. The recognition calls for a response that allows one to renounce not only material possession, but the individual will itself. If we recall, our character's cannot be changed since they are manifestations of individuation in the phenomenal realm. What Schopenhauer suggests the Christian conception of salvation involves is the recognition that individual is simply the manifestation of a greater self, or existence. It is through this knowledge that the Christian is re-born, not simply changed but existing through a universal rather that an individual will.

---

[95]Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation* vol.2 Pg.167
[96] WWR vol.2 Pg.170

> But the key to the reconciliation of these contradictions lies in the fact that the state in which the character is withdrawn from the power of motives does not proceed directly from the will, but from the changed form of knowledge. Thus, so long as the knowledge is only that which is involved in the *principium individuationis*, and which positively follows form the principle of sufficient reason, the power of the motives is irresistible…It is also that which in the Christian Church is called the *new birth* or *regeneration* and the knowledge from which it springs, *the effect of divine grace*. Therefore, it is not a question of a change, but of an entire suppression of the character; and so it happens that, however different the characters that arrived at that suppression were before it, they nevertheless show after it a great similarity in their mode of conduct, although each speaks very differently according to his concepts and dogmas.[97]

The quality of character of the individual who has undergone this change is similar in all individuals from any religion. The recognition of the possibility of this knowledge through religious means is what Schopenhauer respects as the true potential of a pessimistic religion. Without the metaphysical attunement to the nature of human suffering, no religion can lead to the enlightenment from that suffering.

> …the true spirit and kernel of Christianity, as of Brahmanism and Buddhism also, is the knowledge of the vanity of all earthly happiness, complete contempt for it, and the turning away to the existence of quite a different, indeed an opposite, kind.[98]

The change in Schopenhauer's picture, from willing individual to the denial of the will, remarkable resembles Merton's notion of the 'true' self. His pessimism is also reflected in the writings Boff and Sobrino in their assessments of the imposition of culture on the human condition the subsequent material conditioning of the modern self. There is always the question when one is refers to the conditions of 'optimism' and 'pessimism' whether one is not closer to reality than the other.[99] For Schopenhauer, the nature of the character as influenced by the individual will is always a-moral if not immoral. Hence, Schopenhauer considers ethics the greatest mystery. The ethical self is the religious self for Schopenhauer. One does not inform the other, rather they are one in the same.

The final affinity Schopenhauer expresses for Christianity is based in his respect for the true exemplars of Christian life. St. Augustine, Madame de Guyon, and St. Francis of Assisi were among Schopenhauer's most respected exemplars of the potential of Christian life. All, of course, shared a similar greatness of character in virtue of having been reborn with the knowledge of the *principium individuationis,* the source of the transcendence of the empirical self. However, the greatest admiration was saved for the Christian Mystics, especially Meister

---

[97] WWR vol.1 Pg.403

[98] WWR vol.2 Pg.444

[99] In a project running current to this one, Matthew Stephens and myself are investigating the relationship of worldviews like optimism and pessimism to the subjects corresponding apprehension of reality or actual stated of affairs in the world. The underlying question is, can one both understand and apprehend reality and be optimistic? A tentative conclusion is: only in a spiritual fashion can one be optimistic. In this sense, Schopenhauer cannot be seen as being a true pessimist, for he does posit a means of spiritual emancipation.

Eckhart, who Schopenhauer considered able to peer through the Veil of Maya to the very essence of religion, and therefore life and existence proper.

> In my opinion, the teachings of these genuine Christian mystics are related to those of the New Testament as alcohol is to wine; in other words, what becomes visible to us in the New Testament as if through a veil and mist, stands before us in the works of the mystics without cloak or disguise, in full clearness and distinction.[100]

The greatness of Eckhart consisted in his ability to articulate the essence of existence proper to the very core of what religions have in common. This view of life as suffering combined with the means of emancipation through the denial of the will was for Schopenhauer the point where his own philosophy touched with what he considered the great world religions, Christianity, Buddhism, and Brahmanism. The saints of any tradition were considered so by Schopenhauer because of their ability to transcend the particular dogmas of their own religions and see the essence of truth common to all.

The Buddhist Conception of Compassion

> One remarkable thing is that when she knelt to die, she put in front of her the statue of the Virgin Mary and the statue of the woman Bodhisattva, Quan Am, the Buddhist saint of compassion. And she put a poem there: 'Joining my hands, I kneel before Mother Mary and Bodhisattva Quan Am. Please help me to realize fully my vow'.
>
> Thich Nhat Hahn on his friend and Buddhist nun Nhat Chi Mai moments before her self-immolation.

Unlike the Christian conception of compassion, the Buddhist conception of compassion can be accounted for in more general terms since it is a fundamental (doctrinal) principle in all Buddhist traditions. The historical Buddha (Siddhartha Guatama) was the son of nobility but left this comfortable home when he became aware of the fundamental state of suffering and misery in the world. In search of relief from this suffering and answers concerning its nature, the young prince practiced several forms of Hindu aestheticism which involved ritual mortification and radical self-denial. After many years he abandoned this radical life and, in frustration, sat beneath a tree vowing to remain in contemplation until he found enlightenment. The next morning as Venus rose, he gained enlightenment in the form of the Four Noble Truths. Thus began his long life as 'The Enlightened One'.

The Four Noble Truths constitute the fundamental core of Buddhist doctrine. They are as follows: (1) All existence is suffering (*dukkha*). (2) The cause of suffering is desire or attachment (*samudaya*). (3) The cessation of suffering is possible through the relinquishment of desire and attachment. (4) The

[100] WWR vol.1 Pg.387

relinquishment of desire is possible through the adherence to the eightfold path. The Noble Eightfold Path is the Buddhist doctrine for the emancipation from desire. It is similar in form to the Western biblical commandments and beatitudes, but the result of the Buddhist path is enlightenment or *nirvana*. The Eightfold Path consists of Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. These are the components necessary for the liberation from desire and suffering and the historic Buddha taught them unchanged from the time of his enlightenment to the time of his death. As one might guess from the description of the eight principles, they must be understood not as individual commands, but interrelated principles that are practiced together in unison towards the goal of enlightenment.

The path to Buddha-hood involves the manifestation of several characteristics necessary for any individual to be considered a Buddha, or enlightened. There is some discrepancy between traditions as to what metaphysical status the enlightened individual occupies. In reincarnation traditions, nirvana is the state in which one's cycle of birth and death comes to an end. However, several traditions utilize the notion of a Buddhist saint or *Bodhisattva* to indicate individuals who have attained enlightenment but choose to remain on earth to assist other sentient beings on their way. This early notion of a Bodhisattva was simply a Buddha who had not yet died, but the conception has changed into a unique role in several traditions. This status of Bodhisattva is important because this enlightened individual exemplifies all the properties and practices of a Buddha including an endless compassion for all beings.

> In the Bodhisattva Ideal one comes to understand that suffering is not necessarily disclosed to those who suffer, yet nevertheless, exists. Suffering (*duhkha*) is the ground from which the Being of human being arises. It is a deeper suffering than the physical or emotional or psychological although these forms of suffering are symptomatic of this deeper affliction. Such suffering is a universal circumstance of all beings.[101]

The Bodhisattva has developed the ability through the practice of the Eightfold Path to transcend her ego which desires and suffers to recognize the true nature of life; its impermanence, and volatility. Subsequently, the Bodhisattva can understand the true nature of suffering, particularly its deeply rooted foundation in conventional reality (*Samsarsa*). Though the Bodisattva is herself free from karma and subsequently from suffering, the universal compassion she feels for all sentient beings compels her to work towards their own salvation. Compassion (*karuna*) then, is one of two characteristics of the Bodhisattva. It is accompanied, however, and inseparable from wisdom (*prajna*). Wisdom and compassion intimately function together to provide the Bodhisattva both the understanding and the clarity for action.

> ...*prajna* (wisdom) is a very clear, precise, and intelligent state of being. It has a sharp quality, the ability to penetrate and reveal situations. Karuna (compassion) is the open

---

[101] Walsh-Frank, Patricia. Compassion: An East-West Comparison. *Asian Philosophy*. March 1996, Vol.6 Issue 1. Pg.3

> atmosphere in which prajna sees. It is an open awareness of situations which triggers action informed by the eye of prajna. Compassion is very powerful, but it must be directed by the intelligence of prajna, just as intelligence needs the atmosphere of the basic openness of compassion. The two must come simultaneously.[102]

Thus the two-fold nature of compassion is evident in the Buddhist conception. Compassion here involves both the experience of suffering and the subsequent desire to relieve the suffering. Wisdom is necessary here for the identification of suffering and understanding the roots of suffering as well as its potential alleviation. True compassion is manifest in light of true wisdom and the clear understanding of reality.

> Wisdom is the fuel of compassion. In acquiring great wisdom, one advances to nirvana or enlightenment. Although wisdom and nirvana are not the same we cannot have one without the other. When we speak of 'wisdom' we are not speaking of ordinary wisdom but that which transcends the mundane to a profound understanding of the true nature of Being as arising from the ground of universal primordial suffering. Meditation is the vehicle of this profound insight. It brings one to the necessary conclusion that one must become detached from the cravings and desires of this world if one is to be free of the suffering originating in our primordial nature.[103]

This intimate relationship between compassion and wisdom is reflected in some Western accounts of compassion. As we saw in Blum, Snow, and Nussbaum, compassion can be seen as having a rational component and in some accounts it is more integrated than others. In her essay "Compassion: An East-West Comparison", Patricia Walsh-Frank examines the relationship between Western, psychological accounts of compassion and Buddhist accounts. She pays specific attention to Blum's account and this will be helpful to us in attempting to draw out the differences between the conceptions. Walsh-Frank begins by giving credit to Blum for his positive comments about the importance of compassion's role in moral philosophy but she does not waste time demonstrating the many respects in which she considers his account deficient.

If we recall, Blum frames his discussion of compassion in terms of a background debate in philosophy concerning the inadequate attention traditionally given the role of emotions in philosophy. Walsh-Frank agrees with this assessment, but does not prefer the dichotomies created by the categorical distinctions between reason and emotion or subject and object. Blum characterizes compassion in analytic terms as an emotion felt by a subject, directed to an object. Walsh-Frank responds that the creation of this category predisposes one to think of the relationship between the compassionate and the sufferer as one based on an insurmountable division.

> This subject-object dichotomy creates a distance between those needing compassion and those offering it that is virtually unbridgeable. In the end this distance is maintained in such a way that it is clear that Blum does not have in mind a discussion of compassion of

---

[102] Trungpa, Chogyam. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Pg.208
[103] Walsh-Frank, Patricia. Pg.5

> the depth found in Mahayana Buddhism. His analysis never arrives at a discussion of the universal nature of suffering as a primordial condition of human existence.[104]

The problem with Blum's account is that the suffering of an 'object' is only understood indirectly, i.e. by forms of induction or imagination, etc. Shared sense of suffering that Buddhists posit is based in the deeper understanding that suffering is a universal reality and is subsequently shared by all sentient beings. The reality of suffering in this sense is intuited immediately and provides more intimate grounds for the identification with others. By positing the universality of suffering, the Buddhist is not immediately assuming, as Schopenhauer, the underlying unity of beings. Rather she is appealing to an intuitively shared universal experience that transcends the categorical privacy of the subject-object dichotomy.

Although she credits Blum with several insights 'not without depth', the difficulty in failing to transcend the subject-object dichotomy proves to place insurmountable obstacles in front of Blum. As a result, the attempt to overcome the distance between subject and object results in too many qualifications for the authentic manifestation of compassion. What I mean by this is that if the identification between subject and object is not taken for granted as always and already potentially present (the Buddhist conception), then it must be constructed. Blum uses the potential of imagination to remedy this situation. However, imagination does not seem to provide a sufficient condition in respect to compassion. The distance between subject and object results in only an imaginative re-creation of suffering, not an identification. This is important because it results in a clear and ever present realization that my neighbor's suffering *is his suffering* therefore fundamentally and qualitatively different from my own.

> Blum points out that differences between the subject and object are more important than any shared experiences. He continues by saying that when I suffer with my neighbor it is not the same as his suffering, I suffer less than he. Suffering is a matter of degree. This idea is troublesome in this comparison of views because on the Eastern perspective compassion is not discussed as a matter of degree. The fact that a Bodhisattva volunteers to give up entering nirvana until all are saved strongly suggests that he has suffered at least equally; his first hand knowledge of suffering is one of the main motivating forces for his compassionate behavior. The fact that he has known the same suffering as his fellow human beings forms a bond of unity between he and them. In Mahayana this bond is expressed as *gotra* or family in what is regarded here in the purest sense of the word; one with others.[105]

If we recall, all four psychological accounts set up qualitative criteria to judge the seriousness of an individual's suffering. The compassionate subject must deem the objects suffering as 'real' or serious to qualify for a compassionate reaction. For instance, the loss of a child might warrant a compassionate response, but not the failure to make the cheerleading squad. Nussbaum referred to this potential of

---

[104] Ibid. Pg.6
[105] Ibid. Pg.7

relating to someone's 'legitimate' suffering as sharing a eudaimonistic perspective. The question remains, then, how is the Buddhist eudaimonistic perspective different that the Western perspective, and can the two be reconciled?

Walsh-Frank claims that the Western perspective as exemplified by Blum focuses too much on the symptoms or manifestations of suffering in individual circumstances. The compassionate response in these circumstances is equivalent to a doctor treating the symptom and not the disease. One common response might be that of course with a certain emotional detachment we might be able to 'smooth out the bumps' of life, but there are certain tragic experiences that warrant and demand a compassionate response. However, if compassion is really a two-fold conception of identification and alleviation of suffering, treating anecdotal incidences of suffering is impossible if we have no deep connection. In tragic incidences, there can be no relief from suffering if the deeper source of suffering is not identified.

> Blum is expressing the faulty view that we feel compassion for another because of a particular circumstance in his life rather than having the understanding that the suffering the parent experiences over the loss of a child is symptomatic of a deeper problem that is universal and primordial in nature. Since his view is on the particular it allows the observer to sustain a distance from the object of compassion because he (the observer) does not always share in the object's experience.[106]

According to the Buddhist account, this psychological distance is a construction which overlaps a more fundamental and primordial identification with another. The fact that the Buddhist has recognized the reality of suffering allows her to give council in hard times and more importantly attempt to alleviate suffering.

There is a story from the Buddha's life which demonstrates the point. The daughter of a very wealthy family fell in love and ran off with one of the family's servants. She bore two children and after the birth of her second, decided to return to visit her parents. On the journey it began to storm and her husband went into the forest to build a shelter. He was bitten by a snake and died. The next day, she found his body but to save her children she decided to move on. She came to a flooded river and did not have the strength to carry both children over at once. She left the baby on one side and began to cross with the other child. Halfway across, she looked back to see a large hawk swoop down and take the baby away. She panicked and dropped her other child into the raging river. Deep in despair, she returned home to find that both her parents had been killed in a fire the night before. All this was more than she could bear and she began running through the town tearing off her clothes and weeping uncontrollably. The townspeople, unaware of the events, thought her mad and began stoning her. She fled into the grove where the Buddha was speaking. His disciples were alarmed, but the Buddha approached the woman and calmed her. After hearing her story, the Buddha told her that although what had happened to her was awful, she could not repair anything that had been done by suffering or lamenting the loss. He told

[106] Ibid. Pg.6

her to look deep within herself to find the strength to let go of the suffering. She followed the Buddha's teaching and eventually became his disciple and a Bodhisattva in her own right.

This story is meant to illustrate the point that apart from the particular manifestation of suffering, the root of suffering is a common one. In the story, the woman has experienced all the evils imaginable, the events that people fear most. The Buddha's response remains familiar however. To alleviate the woman's suffering the Buddha showed her its source in her desiring for things to be different and her clinging to her desire for her family to be alive. The compassion that the Buddha showed here was not comfort or consolation, but a harder truth. This was the only way to remedy her suffering and be compassionate.

According to Walsh-Frank one of the reasons the dichotomy between the self and other is so important is that the rational aspect of judgment is still required in determining the validity of emotional responses. All four psychological theorists were adamant that a rational criterion be included into the emotional account of compassion. But isn't it true that rationality or wisdom is also inseparable from compassion in the Buddhist conception? How do these conceptions differ in this regard?

> Blum's point is that sometimes we must sort out our feelings of compassion from other feelings to determine which is more appropriate. In a sense, he is recommending that we reason through our compassion to another emotion. Such an idea moves us further from any core notions about the universality of suffering and compartmentalizes our thinking on the topic. Analysis of this kind takes us away from not only an intuitive response to the suffering of others by rationalizing but may well move us into a position where we feel no compassion at all.[107]

The psychological picture suggests that we feel compassion if the rational criteria are present to justify the feeling. The danger in this picture is perhaps the greatest danger to compassion. If we use reason to justify the validity of compassion then compassion becomes a slave to reason. Subsequently, compassion becomes a slave to an abstraction, an idea of the good life like Nussbaum's eudaimonistic conception. In such cases compassion becomes tainted by all the trappings of culture and loses its authenticity, its intuitive immediacy. This is the vehicle through which tools of psychological coercion work. If we can justify ignoring our moral instincts, then we can be lead, even rationally, to justify any action, any injustice.

The Buddhist picture pushes against the subservience of compassion to reason or justification. The fact that beings suffer is alone justification to feel compassion for them. According to Thich Nhat Hanh,

> It is true that the other person suffers, and that alone is worth your compassion. When you begin to understand the suffering of the other person, compassion will arise in you, and the language you use will have the power of healing. Compassion is the only energy

[107] Ibid. Pg.7

> that can help us connect with another person. The person who has no compassion in him can never be happy.[108]

Reason or wisdom can never undermine the immediate identification with another in the Buddhist picture. This is true because the awareness of the universality of suffering becomes manifest not as an abstract proposition of dogma, but an awareness which arises as a result of the practice of mindfulness or meditation. As the Buddhist already has an understanding of this deep connection, no other psychological mechanisms are necessary to explain the awareness of another's suffering. The rational capacity of the Buddhist informs the compassionate action, it does not warrant or justify the emotion itself. This is the fundamental difference between the two conceptions.

The Buddhist picture suggests that wisdom provides us with the understanding of reality, the causal nexus in which we live and its many interdependent relationships. Compassion is the identification with sentient beings who suffer and the willingness to alleviate suffering. It is through wisdom that the Buddhist understands how suffering can be alleviated and what steps may be taken to avoid the potential of causing further suffering in an attempt to help. There is a Zen story which demonstrates this relationship.

> There once was a minor scandal at a Zen monastery when one of the monks came across his master the Abbot throwing stones at some deer that had wandered nearby. The monk was too embarrassed to say anything directly to his master so he just quietly withdrew. Later, he felt so uncomfortable about what he'd seen that he couldn't help mentioning it to his friends, who were all scandalised at the Abbot's behaviour. 'Isn't it of the very essence of Buddhism to have an attitude of loving kindness to all living beings? How could a 'Zen master' act like that and still be a Zen master?' Eventually, after a few days, one of them plucked up enough courage to challenge the master about it. The master explained: 'I've noticed those deer coming by here a few times recently and I was becoming concerned that they might develop the habit of hanging round here, where the hunters would be sure to find and kill them. So I chucked a few stones at them to scare them off.'

This simple story demonstrates the relationship between wisdom and compassion in the Buddhist account. The Abbot does not use wisdom to decide if whether or not his response to the deer should be compassionate, rather, wisdom governs the form in which his compassion is to be expressed. The reality of the situation determined his unconventional response and the young monks did not understand the compassionate nature of the action. In the Buddhist sense, compassion is not always soft, it can take many forms as explained by Chogyam Trungpa,

> The conventional way of thinking, compassion simply means being kind and warm. This sort of compassion is described in the scriptures as 'grandmother's love'. You would except the practitioner of this type of compassion to be extremely kind and gentle; he would not harm a flea. If you need another mask, another blanket to warm yourself, he will provide it. But true compassion is ruthless, from ego's point of view, because it does not consider ego's drive to maintain itself. It is 'crazy wisdom'. It is totally wise, but it

---

[108] Nhat Hahn, Thich. *The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings*. Pg.90

> is crazy as well, because it does not relate to ego's literal and simple minded attempts to secure its own comfort.[109]

This 'crazy wisdom' may help explain how an action such as self-immolation could be understood as a compassionate act. During the Vietnam War, several Vietnamese monks and nuns burned themselves with gasoline to call attention to the suffering cause by the war. Similar events took place in North America and were generally considered suicides by the government and the Catholic Church. In a discussion published under the title *The Raft is Not the Shore*, the Catholic priest Daniel Berrigan and Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh discuss the topic of self-immolation. According to Nhat Hanh, who was acquainted with both individuals,

> Nhat Chi Mai and Thich Quang Duc immolated themselves for others. Because of life. Because they saw their lives in the lives of others. And in a moment of perception of that deep, deep truth, they suddenly lost all fear and gave themselves. I wouldn't want to describe these acts as suicide or even sacrifice. Maybe they didn't think of it as a sacrifice. Maybe they did. They may have thought of their act as a very natural thing to do, like breathing. The problem is to understand the situation and the context in which they acted.[110]

The psychological conceptions of compassion are unable to give any compelling answer to explain such an unusual action. Nhat Hanh's answer is more interesting and draws out many features of the Buddhist conception of compassion that we have already discussed. First the deep sense of association with others who suffer and the identification with that suffering; and second the wisdom which informed them of the profound means by which they might address or awaken those who had yet to recognize the same suffering as well. The sheer horror of the act still impresses anyone who sees the images of the burning people, unmoved, unflinching in the lotus position. The shock is unforgettable, but understanding is what the sacrificed desired most.

> As Phuong once put it, "If you want to buy something, you should pay something. And now you want to buy something very, very precious like the understanding of people. So you don't have anything more precious than your life. You pay by your own life. You try to exchange your life for understanding of peace, of brotherhood, and cooperation".[111]

It is difficult to imagine the thinking that lead up to the first of these acts. Again, the wisdom that guides compassion is not always conventional in respects to our own understanding of reality. Conventional reality (*samsara*) in Buddhism is profoundly egocentric and the thought of sacrificing oneself is unimaginable as the satisfaction of the ego is the focus of all goals and desires. The transcendence of samsara reveals a deeper wisdom, a view of reality that has no locus in the ego. Hence actions performed outside the ego (ego-less actions) have no meaning or rationale to the outside observer. Often it is the shock of these actions that allows

---

[109] Trungpa, Pg.210

[110] Nhat Hahn, Thich & Berrigan, Daniel. *The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Towards a Buddhist Christian Awareness*. Pg.65

[111] Ibid. Pg.65

the observer to transcend her own egoistic perspective. While society attempted to rationalize these actions as suicides or acts of insanity, their true meaning could only be understood in the context of their selfless compassion for others. This reaching out through 'crazy wisdom' appeals to us in a way that cannot be rationalized, cannot be understood conventionally. It is not tragic in the way that suicide is tragic, as a final or ultimate act of will. It is tragic in the sense that a viable, peaceful person felt it necessary to smash the illusion that ultimate source of suffering could go forever unnoticed and unchallenged.

The Buddhist conception of compassion can be referred to as ontological because the practice of the Eightfold Path, including meditation, reveals the deep ontological structures which are the ground of suffering and identification. As one makes ones way along the path, wisdom and compassion are nurtured and grow in relation to the understanding that one achieves concerning the ultimate realities of suffering and its alleviation. One cannot practice Buddhism without also practicing compassion. The understanding and wisdom arising from practice are intuitive and unconventional. The experience of compassion is most important and this apart form anything forms the difference between psychological and Buddhist conceptions of compassion.

Schopenhauer on Buddhism

Schopenhauer became acquainted with Buddhism after the first publication of *World as Will and Representation*. He was proud to bring this fact to the attention of his readers in the years following because his philosophical system seemed to correspond so naturally to his understanding of the Buddhist conceptions of human nature and reality. Any reader even remotely acquainted with the basic doctrines of Buddhist thought will be surprised at the deep connections Schopenhauer has with both epistemic and moral aspects of Buddhism.

> If I wished to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I should have to concede to Buddhism pre-eminence over the others. In any case, it must be a pleasure to me to see my doctrine in such close agreement with a religion that the majority of men on earth hold as their own, for this numbers far more followers than any other.[112]

In fact, his belief in the obvious compatibility between the two philosophies prevented him from engaging in a detailed comparison at any point in his life. This did not, however, prevent him from claiming affinity with the religion and in one period even referring to himself as a 'Buddhaist'.

There is a clear correspondence between both key aspects of Schopenhauer's major work (will and representation) and central Buddhist doctrines concerning the nature of reality. Following Brahman and Buddhist traditions, Schopenhauer interprets his Kantian phenomenal 'world as representation' as a contemporary

---

[112] Schopenhauer, Arthur. *World as Will and Representation*. Vol.2 Pg. 169

'Veil of Maya', the shroud which prevents human beings access to the ultimate nature of reality. His also hold the conviction that Buddhism as well as Christianity are both religions based on a fundamental pessimism.[113] By this Schopenhauer means that their account of the nature of reality is fundamentally one of suffering and one requiring salvation. Schopenhauer understands the first Noble Truths as exemplifying this belief.

> At bottom, optimism is the unwarranted self-praise of the real author of the world, namely of the will-to-live which complacently mirrors itself in its work. Accordingly optimism is not only a false but also a pernicious doctrine, for it presents life as a desirable state and man's happiness as its aim and object. Starting from this, everyone then believes he has the most legitimate claim to happiness and enjoyment. If, as usually happens, these do not fall to his lot, he believes that he suffers an injustice, in fact that he misses the whole point of his existence; whereas it is far more correct to regard work, privation, misery, and suffering, crowned by death, as the aim and object of our life (as done by Brahmanism, and Buddhism, and also by genuine Christianity), since it is these that lead to the denial of the will-to-live.[114]

Although Buddhist doctrine is almost never presented in as pessimistic a fashion as Schopenhauer likes to present it, his interpretation in not the emphasis, is fundamentally correct. The goal in life is not the pursuit of happiness through the will or even through correct willing, but to avoid suffering through the denial of the will-to-live. This does not equate, of course, with the act of suicide (which Schopenhauer considers to be the ultimate act of willing) but rather with the privation of the will all together. This is seen by many in the West as having similar roots to the Stoic traditions. Schopenhauer acknowledges this similarity but denies the essential correlation as he considers the Stoics still too concerned with eudaemonism rather that full abdication of the will.[115] The good life is not a matter of balance or the pursuit of virtue which are for Schopenhauer optimistic qualities. In the fundamental essence of suffering is not recognized as an essential quality of human existence, there is no potential for salvation.

Another interesting similarity Schopenhauer's philosophy shares with Buddhist tradition is his refusal to reify rationality in the tradition of Western philosophy. In Schopenhauer's system, especially in his moral philosophy, reason was clearly the slave to the will. In opposition to the Kantian picture, reason does not tell us what to do, what is right or good, rather it affords us the tools to better execute the bidding of the all-powerful will. Reason allows a clearer conception of our causal nexus, helping us to conceive of the limits of our moral world. On the other hand, reason makes one a more cunning criminal, a cleverer torturer, a more brilliant thief. Reason cannot motivate us to do good, nor bad, it is simply a tool of the will, evolved exclusively to do its bidding. The will is and always has been prior

---

[113] This interpretation is not incorrect, but certainly open to different interpretations according to which school of Buddhism one chooses as a reference point. This is clearly shown in Peter Ableson's Schopenhauer and Buddhism. *Philosophy East and West*. Vol.43 #2 April 1993

[114] Ibid. Pg.584

[115] In fact he sees the Roman Stoics as dilettantes compared to the Greek cynics, Diogenes the Dog in particular.

to reason. As in Buddhism however reason stands beside compassion as twin virtues. In fact, this is more so the case in Buddhism as Schopenhauer considers even justice to have its roots in compassion whereas Buddhism is willing to admit its necessary rational foundation in wisdom.

There are several other aspects of Schopenhauer's thought that share similarities with Buddhism. However, many of these have been discussed in great detail in the previously mentioned paper by Peter Abelson whose thorough effort need not be repeated here. I depart now, as well, with the knowledge that I will soon return to the theme of Buddhism as we investigate in detail Schopenhauer's conception of salvation and revisit the potential for a normative theory of compassion.

Phenomenological Conceptions of Compassion

> *Any system of ethics that does not furnish a full account of how other human beings are given and experience within one's own self must remain deficient because an account of comportment must be given with regards to its relation to and bearing on other persons.*
>
> Manfred Frings

Scheler on Compassion

In the heyday of phenomenology, Max Scheler was one of the movement's most respected figures. Although his legacy does not compare to those of Husserl's and Heidegger's, his work was held in highest regard by both philosophers as well as the phenomenological community at large. For the most part Scheler worked independently from the phenomenological community. He did correspond frequently with Heidegger while the latter was writing *Being and Time* but unlike Heidegger, he had no academic affiliations with Husserl and was frequently at odds with Husserl's formulation of phenomenology. Scheler attacked, as did Heidegger, the Husserlian idea of a transcendental ego (the supposed perspective from which Husserl brackets judgments about objects of experience to gain insight into the object's essence). His phenomenology was based on the notion that after phenomenological investigation, the essence of Man is found to be 'person' whose fundamental quality of loving presupposes ego, reason, and will. Scheler referred to this loving essence as the '*ordo amoris*'.

> Whoever has the *ordo amoris* of man, has man himself. He has for man as a moral subject what the crystallization formula is for crystal. He sees through him as far as one possibly can. He sees before him the constant simple and basic lines of his heart running beneath all empirical many-sidedness and complexity. And heart deserves to be called the core of man as a spiritual being much more so than knowing and willing. He has a spiritual model of the primary source which secretly nourishes everything issuing forth from this man. Even more, he possesses the primary determinant of what always keeps

> on settling himself around him: in space, his *moral milieu*; in time, his fate; that is, to become the quintessence of what possible can happen to him and *to him alone*.[116]

Scheler's first major works focused primarily on the *odo amoris*; discerning the relationship of feelings and their associated values to fellow human beings, the world, and the divine.

In his second major work, *The Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler examines the role of feeling-with in all its various forms and provides a clear positive model of fellow-feeling as well as critical analyses of both 'genetic' (psychological) and Schopenhauerian (metaphysical) conceptions of compassion. Scheler does not choose to use the term compassion (Mitleid) for his positive conception of fellow-feeling, most likely to avoid the formulations that both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche used in relation to the term. Also, fellow-feeling can involve a shared joy, not simply suffering as with compassion so it is generally a wider concept. Instead of *Mitleid*, in reference to the spirit of the notion of compassion referred to in this work until now, Scheler uses the more general fellow-feeling.

Scheler identifies four distinct types of fellow-feeling which include the 'mere' variety as well as the more profound, ethically significant identifications.

> (1) Immediate community of feeling, e.g. of one and the same sorrow, 'with someone'.
> (2) Fellow-feeling 'about something'; rejoicing in his joy and commiserating in his sorrow.
> (3) Mere emotional infection.
> (4) True emotional identification.[117]

In the "immediate community of feeling", Scheler give the example of two parents grieving over a dead child. The two share the same sorrow, but the sorrow is not causally transferred from one to another. Rather, they share in the same experience, they 'feel-in-common'. Scheler says that this communion is different than, if for instance, a third party came upon the couple and was so moved to feel grief. The later would not be included in the same community of feeling as the first two.

The second example of Fellow-feeling "about something" is similar to the community of feeling in the respect that one person's emotion is not the cause of the other's. However, unlike the first case, A's feeling for B is first received in an "act of understanding" or a vicarious emotional intuition. What he means by this is that unlike the first case, the two phenomenological experiences, B's suffering and A's commiserating, are distinguishable, while in the first example, the two individuals share a common experience.

Scheler believes that in all cases of genuine fellow-feeling, the response involves an "intentional reference" of the feeling (joy or sorrow) to the experience of the

---

[116] Scheler, Max. *Collected Works Vol. XI Schriften aus dem Nachlass*. Pg.348
[117] Scheler, Max. *On the Nature of Sympathy*. Pg.12

other. What does this mean? Scheler believes that we experience a spontaneous, non-cognitive recognition of the other's emotion.

> It points this way simply qua feeling—there is no need of any prior judgment or intimation that 'the other person is in trouble'; nor does it arise only upon sight of the other's grief, for it can also 'envisage' such grief, and does so, indeed, in its very capacity as a feeling.[118]

It is this strong belief in the immediacy and primacy of this kind of identification that sets the phenomenological views apart from their psychological counterparts. Scheler insists that there is no cognitive reconstruction of belief or imaginative process in order to create the phenomenon of fellow-feeling; rather we have an immediate, intuitive feeling of mental anguish as we feel with another. Although fellow-feeling is fundamentally a re-action, the reaction is based on an emotive understanding or "vicarious feeling". Thus the two steps of fellow-feeling are clearly distinguishable, first the "vicariously visualized feeling" and second the emotional participation. Here Scheler is clearly responding to psychologism in the voice of Theodore Lipps,

> Quite a number of philosophers have alleged that the phenomenological course of fellow-feeling largely consists in a kind of comparison, which, if put into words, would run as follows: 'How would it be if that happened to me?' Whatever the palace of such a comparison may occupy in life, it certainly has nothing to do with genuine fellow feeling. If only because the answer would very often be, 'Had it happened to me, with my character and temperament, it would have not been so bad; but being the sort of person he is, it is a serious matter for him'. True fellow-feeling betrays itself in the very fact that it includes the existence and character of the other person as an individual, as a part of the commiserating or rejoicing.[119]

The difference between the two concepts of feeling and participation is clearly demonstrated as well in the absence of fellow-feeling. Scheler believes that the cruel man demonstrated the first property but is essential devoid of the second; in fact the visualization of suffering makes the cruel man's awareness possible while the fellow-feeling is entirely absent as the pleasure of the cruel man increases. Cruelty is not simply being insensitive to another's suffering. Rather it is the enjoyment in knowing another suffers which is quite distinct from indifference.

Scheler refers to the third instance of fellow-feeling as "emotional infection". In fact, emotional infection is not really and actual example of fellow-feeling, but is often confused with one. This is Scheler's reason for taking it up in relation to the rest of the topics. Emotional infection is best demonstrated with the example of entering a cheery pub (or beer garden as Scheler mentions) and having one's emotional state picked up or enlivened by the surrounding atmosphere. Manfred Frings provides an excellent example of a television sit-com's 'laugh-track' being used as a tool to promote emotional infection. Where one might not find a joke funny in itself, the sound of people laughing in accompaniment might evoke a

---

[118] Ibid. Pg.13
[119] Ibid. Pg.39

jovial response. Other modern-day examples of infection might include riots invoked by sporting events, or political rallies.
These responses emulate the 'herd' mentality that Scheler attributes to groups of animals that become infected and subsequently respond to stimuli as one unit. Although Scheler believes that emotional infection has clearly little to do with true fellow-feeling, he devotes attention to the topic due to several 'errors' he sees being committed by contemporary authors like Spencer, Darwin, and especially Nietzsche. In quoting a passage from the *Anti-Christ*, Scheler accuses Nietzsche of a complete misunderstanding of the distinction between fellow-feeling and emotional infection.

> Through pity, suffering itself becomes infectious; in certain circumstances it may lead to a total loss of life and vital energy which is absurdly out of proportion to the magnitude of the cause(—the case of the death of the Nazarene). This depressing and infectious instinct thwarts those instincts which aim at the preservation and enhancement of the value of life; by multiplying misery quite as much as preserving all that is miserable, it is the principle agent in promoting decadence.[120]

Scheler claims that Nietzsche is confusing pity with emotional infection. He claims that suffering does not become infectious through pity. On the contrary, it becomes infectious only where pity is excluded. In order to feel pity for someone, I must feel his suffering *as his*. Infection occurs when I feel another's suffering *as my own*. In order for pity to be a "multiplier of misery" it would be necessary for pity to be identical to emotional infection. However, as pity is a form of true fellow-feeling, a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved.

Scheler refers to the fourth and final form of fellow-feeling as emotional identification which he considers to be an extreme form of emotional infection. In the case of emotional identification, one can experience the phenomenon of 'merging' with another or having another merge with oneself (hetero and idiopathic). Scheler uses the example of someone watching a trapeze artist and becoming immersed in the experience to the extent that they physically mimic the movements of the performer. Another example is totemism, the belief that one shares an identity with an ancestor or representative animal. One may take of the characteristics of this animal in ritual and act in unison with its spirit. Again, as this behavior is a form of emotional infection which is not an actual member of the class fellow-feeling, it is not important to pursue emotional identification further at this time. That is not to say, of course that this topic is not of substantial interest.

According to Manfred Frings there are three foundations of Scheler's theory of fellow-feeling. The first is that in order to experience fellow-feeling with another the feeling must be re-produced. This re-production is pre-cognitive, meaning that it is spontaneous not conscious. The second foundation is that the vicarious feeling which reproduce feelings of another also presuppose the same feelings in the other. The third foundation states that these feeling constitute a shared

---

[120] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ*. Pg.131

humanity or ground for the loving relationship which is the potential for all human beings no matter how undeveloped. In sympathy, myself and another are experiences as ontological equivalents. This common selfhood presupposes any understanding of 'other minds' and serves as the ground for a shared humanity.

There is one more section of note in *The Nature of Sympathy* entitled "The Perception of Other Minds". In this section Scheler presents a strong rebuttal of the psychological theories which presume an immediate problem of other minds as well as producing a phenomenological theory concerning the possibility of an intuitive perception of the feelings of others.

Scheler begins setting up the problem by suggesting that certain harmful assumptions often underlie psychological accounts of empathy and have existed thus far unchecked. These assumptions are problematic because they are (1) unfounded in empirical and phenomenological observations and (2) because they preclude the possibility of an intuitive knowledge of the feelings of others.

> The difficulties of this problem are mostly self-engendered, owing to the assumption that each of us is 'primarily' aware of his own self and its experiences, and that among these only a proportion of such experiences, images, etc., are related to other individuals. The question then arises: (1) how can this portion be distinguished from that other portion which relates only to the self and its own experience? (2) How does the portion relating to others acquire a title to make us acquainted with the actual existence of other people?[121]

Scheler claims that two forms of theory are traditionally responsible for the perpetuation of this assumption. The first claims that we posit the existence of other minds through *analogical inference*. This means that we observe behavior in others which we identify as being similar to our own and infer similar metal correspondence between ourselves and others. The second theory Scheler attributes to Theodore Lipps, a psychologist who often felt the brunt of phenomenological attacks. The theory claims that we establish the existence of other minds by empathetically projecting ourselves into the physical body of another. Neither of these theories stands any scrutiny according to Scheler, especially phenomenological investigation.

The analogy argument is considered the weakest due to evidence found in early development and animal studies. Animals and children seem to have an acute awareness of the emotive character of others far before, in the human case, they have the developmental ability to empathize, and in animal case, despite their possible inability to empathize. Scheler makes an almost Wittgensteinian point to suggest that the use of analogy is only a secondary manifestation of a deeper sense of identification. The 'analogizing' is actually not observable behavior, but is imposed or inferred by the observer.

> One should not impute to children or primitives the world-view of a civilized adult, and then go on to postulate real processes in order to transform the picture back into that of

[121] Scheler, Max. *On the Nature of Sympathy*. Pg.238

> the child or the primitive...The fact is that we only make analogical inferences when we already take the existence of some other animate beings for granted, and are acquainted with their inner life...[122]

Wittgenstein's similar linguistic point concerned Augustine's ostensive description of language learning. As Wittgenstein points out that Augustine describes a child's learning a language as someone who already *has* a language, so Scheler describes the analogy theory of empathy as someone who already recognizes the existence of other minds.

The second theory gives way under the scrutiny of the phenomenological method. Scheler identifies two assumptions common to both theories.

> But now let us enquire if the two-fold starting point of these to theories is *phenomenologically accurate*: (1) that it is always our own self, merely, that is primarily given to us; (2) that what is primarily give in the case of others is merely the appearance of the body, its changes, its movements, etc., and that only on the strength of this do we somehow come to accept it as animate and to presume the existence of another self.[123]

The first assumption, phenomenologically speaking, has no ground for Scheler. This claim is not simply a form of skepticism, rather it appeals to the very phenomenon of fellow-feeling. It is clear that we experience sympathetic towards other often so far as to say we fell as they feel. If there is no psychological assumption that we can only feel our own feelings, the question opens up to ask how is it that I apparently feel as another? Scheler claims that the developmental picture clearly shows selfhood as talking a back-seat to several other communal or familial influences on internal perceptions. Only out of this pool of fellow-feeling does individuality emerge. The content of the mind, however, is by no means vacant at this time. We accumulate the relational data of experience and come to form our world-view in a non-solipsistic context. Scheler claims it to be a psychological prejudice that we have little knowledge of other selves and much of our own. In fact, he says, the opposite holds true.

Self knowledge for Scheler is a matter of internal perception. However, it is not clear that the object of this internal perception necessarily be 'me' or 'myself'. Again, this would involve a psychological assumption. Scheler believes that in contact with another we gain a sense that is not immediately recognizable to one's cognitive understanding. This sense, which is then becomes the reference of internal perception, is the source of knowledge of others. This sense is not transmitted metaphysically, or magically as in the pan-psychist theory of consciousness or Schopenhauer's theory of the metaphysical self. Rather it is communicated in physical proximity via subtle pre-cognitive cues.

> Our claim is, rather, that so far as concerns the act and its nature and the range of facts appearing with it, everyone can apprehend the experience of his fellow-men just as directly (or indirectly) as he can his own. It is only the inescapable difference in our

---

[122] Ibid. Pg.240
[123] Ibid. Pg.244

> physical circumstances, in so far as they govern the selection of that part of our purely mental life which appears in internal perception (in which capacity we describe them as 'internal sense'), which determines that through B may have had the same actual experience as A, the picture that he has of it is always different that A's.[124]

However, Scheler insists that this is not simply a behaviorist account in response to the second psychological assumption. It is not simply the behavior of another or forms of cognitively significant actions or emotions. These perceptions are understood in what Scheler refers to as 'integral wholes'.

> Our immediate perceptions of our fellow men do not relate to their bodies (unless we happen to be engaged in a medical examination), nor yet to their 'selves' or 'souls'. What we perceive are *integral wholes*, whose intuitive content is not immediately resolved in terms of external or internal perception. But the fact that the individual bodily unity thus immediately presented should be associated, in general, with a possible object accessible both to internal and external perception, is founded upon the intrinsic connection between these intuitive contents, a connection which also underlies my own perception of myself. It is not acquired through observation and induction from my own case. Such a connection holds good for the nature of all living organisms generally.[125]

Scheler believes in a twofold transmission of sensory data from one individual to another. We understand signs and signals from others on a cognitive level and do form interpretations of other minds from this data. However, we also receive data at a pre-cognitive level. This date is understood only be the internal perception of the individual and is similar to the same information we receive about ourselves. So at a critical level, we understand others in a similar mode as our own self understanding. This level of understanding is only evident through a rigorous phenomenological method and Scheler sees the goal of his early work as the articulation of this investigation.

Although certain philosophical common sense does not support this view of other minds, there are certain good examples in neuroscience that support the positing of subtle pre-cognitive relationships between our ideas about other persons and our experience of them. In his book *Phantoms in the Brain*, V.S. Ramachandran provides an excellent example of the subtle relationship existing between our emotional response to others and our cognitive understanding of them. Ramachandran gives an example of a young man who, after a severe car accident, began manifesting symptoms of what is referred to as Capgras' delusion. On recovering from his accident, the young man Arthur regained much of his normal functioning except for one bizarre manifestation. Arthur believed that his parents were impostors. While he seemed to have normal cognitive functions in areas of memory and recognition, he was convinced that his real parents had hired actors to take care of him. Ramachandran claims that this behaviour is caused by damage to the amygdala which receives information concerning recognition from the temporal lobes and transfers it to the limbic system which is responsible for our emotional responses to situations. What was happening when Arthur saw his

---

[124] Ibid. Pg.256
[125] Ibid. Pg.262

parents was that his recognition of them was not accompanied by a 'warm glow' of emotional recognition. The absence of this response lead Arthur to believe that his parents were impostors. This belief is so strong that in one case of Capgras' an individual who believed his stepfather an automaton actually decapitated him in order to look for microchips in his brain. Interestingly enough, Arthur did not make the same error when speaking to his parent on the telephone. Ramachandran supposes that this is because the pathway from the auditory centre of the brain to the limbic system is different that the visual pathway. What is most interesting about this story is that the mere absence of an expected emotional response to a situation was enough to lead one to an absolutely irrational conclusion. Arthur's irrational responses even extended to himself at times. He believed there were two Arthurs and that he was actually the impostor! Although Arthur's case is tragic, it is philosophically amazing. In relation to Scheler's point about psychological preconceptions, without examples like this, it is simple to postulate distinctions between reason and emotion, self and other. It is only in these special circumstances that age-old philosophical conceptions can be recognized as naïve or groundless.

I do not raise this issue to show a direct correlation between Scheler's mental categories and the Capgras story. What I intend this story to show is that the intimate relationship between our cognition and our emotions takes place on many subtle, almost imperceptible levels. For Scheler to posit that the relationship of ourselves to others has foundations in these precognitive states is certainly not a leap of scientific reason although it does challenge the Cartesian common sense of some philosophical conceptions of the self. Scheler's phenomenological conception of fellow-feeling is as interesting as it is robust. One important thing we must take form it is that the relationship between individuals in empathy or compassion does not necessarily require the long leap across the solipsistic gap. The empathetic understanding of others may be closer and more natural that we can imagine at first glance. Perhaps the methods of phenomenology and rigorous introspection can provide deeper insights into our own nature that 'empirical' psychology.

Scheler on Schopenhauer

In *Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler has a short commentary on Schopenhauer's metaphysical view of *Mitleid*. In his commentary, Scheler compliments Schopenhauer for providing a strikingly modern view-point on several aspects of his theory of compassion but can abide neither Schopenhauer's metaphysics nor his pessimistic *Weltanschauung*. Scheler praises four attributes of Schopenhauer's conception of compassion. First, he compliments Schopenhauer for reaffirming the value of feeling in moral philosophy. By this he refers specifically to Schopenhauer's attack on Kant's rational re-construction of morality. This type of response to Kant did not find much support until the late part of this century. Secondly, he praises Schopenhauer's postulation that compassion is an immediate recognition of suffering in others and not a rational

or imaginative reconstruction. In this view, Scheler agrees with Schopenhauer in his criticism of the view that necessarily arises from psychological perspectives which take the problem of other minds to be the fundamental stumbling block of theories of empathy. Schopenhauer is correct in rejecting the psychological view of empathetic projection, but this is not to say that he has himself transcended the subject/object dichotomy and Scheler is certainly not satisfied with Schopenhauer's metaphysical resolution to the problem.

In his two final positive comments, Scheler claims that Schopenhauer "goes beyond his time" in both attributing to compassion an intentional character (not seeing it simply as a "blind condition of the soul"), and understanding the underlying unity of life that presupposes and subsequent theoretical conception of fellow-feeling. Again, Scheler feels that Schopenhauer walks backwards into these beliefs, i.e. comes to the correct conclusions but via the wrong beliefs. Scheler cannot criticize strongly enough Schopenhauer's metaphysical monism which he believes leads Schopenhauer to the belief that the moral worth of pity itself is to allow greater suffering through identification rather than diminish it.

Although Scheler has several criticisms concerning Schopenhauer's conception of compassion, I will focus on two major issues.[126] First, Scheler takes issue with Schopenhauer's characterization of the nature and role of compassion. Scheler sees Schopenhauer as valuing suffering in and of itself as a means to salvation.

> Since suffering in general represents, for him, the essential 'way of salvation', it is only as a form of suffering and as a mode of apprehending its ubiquitous presence that pity acquires the positive value he attributes to it.[127]

Although I will not discuss Schopenhauer's theory of salvation at this point, I have to take issue with Scheler's characterization of his theory of *Mitleid*. For Scheler, the experience of compassion allows for the relief of suffering. In Schopenhauer's case, Scheler sees this as being the opposite. He believes that Schopenhauer posits the experience of compassion as the occasion to share in a 'universal suffering' or *Samsara*[128]. Thus the recognition of Schopenhauer's principle of individuation would allow one to recognize the suffering of all and realize salvation through it. Scheler here seems to follow Nietzsche's claim about the reification of pity causing universal suffering. There is much reason to believe, however, that this interpretation of Schopenhauer is highly questionable.

Scheler seems to be confused, as was Nietzsche, about the actual role that compassion plays for Schopenhauer. As we discussed in chapter two, the

---

[126] For a deeper investigation on the Schopenhauer/Scheler debate see Michael Maidan's Max Scheler's Criticism of Schopenhauer's Account of Morality and Compassion and David Cartwright's Scheler's Criticism of Schopenhauer's Theory of "Mitleid".

[127] Ibid. Pg.52

[128] The meaning of Samsara is not suffering, but 'conventional reality'. The nature of this reality may indeed be suffering, but the constituents of this reality are the attitudinal comportments of individuals, not suffering per se.

experience of pity is the vehicle by which one acts for the interest of others. Schopenhauer is careful to show (especially in his attack on psychology) that in compassion, although we do share in another's suffering, the distinction between myself and another always remains. I am always acutely aware that another's suffering is his own and not mine. The role that *Mitleid* plays then is to make another's will to be free of suffering my own. In this sense, it is not the suffering that is shared and multiplied, but the will towards the cessation of suffering.

The second confusion in Scheler's interpretation of Schopenhauer involves the overwhelming role Schopenhauer attributes in moral philosophy to suffering. As we have seen, Schopenhauer does indeed see the foundation of morality as compassion, and compassion as primarily a response to suffering. This view does not leave much room for the value of shared positive emotions such as joy and love, for instance. This absence often moves commentators on compassion to characterize it as one of many valuable empathetic responses to another. Scheler believes that Schopenhauer forsakes the possibility of the moral value of any emotion but pity.

> A further indication that Schopenhauer is not primarily concerned with the positive evaluation of the element of fellowship in pity, but with the suffering that it contains, is that he treats pity as having a higher ethical value than rejoicing, besides holding it to be more widely distributed in practice.[129]

It is not clear, however, that Scheler understands Schopenhauer's idea about the roots of suffering and joy. For Schopenhauer, suffering is the only positive emotion. It is positive in the sense that it can be created or diminished, it comes in different quantities and qualities. Joy, however, as well as happiness is negative for Schopenhauer. What this means is that happiness is simply the absence of suffering. It has no positive character. So we are happy or joyful to the extent that we do not suffer.

> All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive. It is not a gratification which comes to us originally and of itself, but it must always be the satisfaction of a wish. For desire, that is to say, want, is the precedent condition of every pleasure...[130]

Schopenhauer then is never compelled to advocate the pursuit of pleasure or happiness in the conventional sense, for he sees it as leading inevitably to more suffering. In a deeper sense, which Scheler never recognizes, the movement of ones will to relinquish the suffering in another is the action of a happy person, a person who sees his own will as part of the macro chasm. Subsequently, the emancipation from suffering in ones own life involves the denial of the will. This idea bears a striking resemblance to the Buddhist conception of suffering and happiness, although Schopenhauer developed his own conception previous to his familiarization with Buddhist thought. In section three, I will discuss at length

---

[129] Ibid. Pg.54

[130] Schopenhauer, Arthur. *World as Will and Representation. Vol. I* Pg.319

Schopenhauer's conception of salvation so it is sufficient here to say that although at times Scheler does have valid concerns with Schopenhauer's metaphysical position, his understanding of Schopenhauer's conception of *Mitleid* is flawed.

Heidegger on Empathy and Mit-dasein.

Like Scheler, Martin Heidegger did not accept the presuppositions he saw underlying the discussion of the concept of empathy (*Einfühlung*) in German philosophy. The term was relatively new at the time, having been invented by Theodore Lipps at the turn of the century. The conception of empathy was also undergoing substantial philosophical and psychological investigation by several contemporaries of Heidegger such as his teacher Husserl, Husserl's student Edith Stein, Heidegger's contemporary Scheler, as well as the psychological community associated with Lipps' research. In a brief section 1.4.26 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger critiques the concept of empathy and suggests an interesting alternative to the analysis of the phenomenon of being-with-others.

Heidegger is an important figure in this context because his ontology of human existence serves to develop an alternative picture to the psychological/metaphysical dichotomy we find out discussion of compassion has adopted. The phenomenological approach has potential to offer an alternative conception of self-other relationships that avoid the pitfalls of both psychological and metaphysical pictures. Even if the question of the ground of compassion is left aside, the hermeneutical method of analysis that Heidegger proposes might provide a bridge from the mere theorizing about compassion to the potential manifestation of compassion in ones life via a philosophical practice of sorts. However, we will return to this question after Heidegger's critique of empathy is made clearer.

Heidegger avoids beginning his discussion of being-with-others in the ordinary philosophical context. This view assumes the isolated Cartesian self and must subsequently construct an experience of inter-subjectivity or 'bridge' to others and the outside world. Heidegger's self or *Da-sein* has the fundamental character of being-in-the-world which is what the term Da-sein fundamentally indicates (being-there). Da-sein does not dwell in the world as an isolated being. Heidegger claims that the relationship between Da-sein is not based on distinction of self from other, rather they are "those from whom one mostly does *not* distinguish oneself, those among whom one is, too."[131] This means that Da-sein's relationship to others is fundamentally distinct from its relationship to things. The relationship, although it may be represented and reconstructed, is not fundamentally based on a cognitive perception of others. Its foundation is primordial in the sense that it exists before and is assumed by any subsequent characterizations of the relationship. According to Heidegger,

---

[131] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. §118

> The world of Da-sein is a *with-world*. Being-in is *being-with* others. The innerworldly being-in-itself of others is *Mitda-sein*.[132]

In opposition to this view, the Cartesian self discovers others in the same fundamental sense that it related to things, as objects of a subjective experience. The other-ness of the Cartesian subject's world comes from the positing of an imaginative or reconstructive life onto objects that appear to share a similar form or existence as ourselves. This is the psychological picture from which many philosophical pseudo-problems (as Heidegger says) arise. The problem of other minds, skepticism about the emotional states of others, skepticism about the authenticity of empathy, etc., all arise from the subjective experience of the world and others in it.

> The term 'empathy' has provided a guiding thread for a whole range of fundamentally mistaken theories concerning man's relationship to other human beings and to other beings in general, theories that we are only gradually beginning to overcome today.[133]

Heidegger, in similar fashion to Scheler, denies the possibility of this picture by denying the primacy of Da-sein's self-knowledge. In stressing the primary social dimension of Da-sein's experience of Heidegger remarks,

> The others are not encountered by grasping and previously discriminating one's own subject, initially objectively present, from other subjects also present. They are not encountered by first looking at oneself and then ascertaining the opposite pole of a distinction. They are encountered from the *world* in which Dasein, heedful and circumspect, essentially dwells. As opposed to the theoretically concocted "explanations" of the objective presence of others which easily urge themselves upon us, we must hold fast to the phenomenal fact that which we have indicated of their being encountered in the *surrounding world*.[134]

It is the social element of Dasein that is fundamental for Heidegger. Not only does Dasein understand others through the social world, it gains the sense of oneself, as Heidegger says, "by *looking away* from its 'experiences' and the 'center of its actions' or by not yet 'seeing' them all". That is to say, Dasein discovers itself through the careful attention to its relationship to the world. In this sense, Heidegger turns the Cartesian conception of the self upside down. In denying primacy to self knowledge as the ground of our knowledge of others, Heidegger shifts the question of empathy from 'how do we know others' to 'how does Da-sein avoid or conceal the precognitive understanding of being-with-others'?

Heidegger claims we have a 'special' knowledge of others precisely because we experience them in a unique way. We experience others not as objects like other objects in the world, but as other persons doing what we ourselves do. We "meet them at work", which means for Heidegger that we come to understand them as they occupy their own being-in-the-world. Understanding this comportment is

---

[132] Ibid. §119
[133] Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Pg.203
[134] *Being and Time*.§119

distinct from understanding how objects are or even how animals are in the world because the latter do not attend to matters in this unique way.[135] Heidegger designates this special being-with-others as *Mitda-sein.*

Mitda-sein is not a simple factical statement about a particular Da-sein, rather it is an existential category of Da-sein, it is a mode of being. What this means is that Mitda-sein does not take on this fundamental quality of being-with simply by being in the presence of other individuals. Even alone, Mitda-sein is still together-with. Hence it is an aspect or quality of Da-sein rather than an aspect of a particular situation. Even being alone Heidegger only qualifies as a deficient mode of Mitda-sein.

Indifferent modes of Mitda-sein can often be confused with the "pure objective presence of several subjects" by which Heidegger means the inauthentic being-with in social situations where persons might be overlooked or ignored by their fellows. Rather than misinterpreting this 'ontological distance' as the objectification of fellow Da-sein, Heidegger suggests that this indifference towards other is a deficient mode of care or being-with.

> ...ontologically there is an essential distinction between the 'indifferent' being together of arbitrary things and the not-mattering-to-one-another of beings who are with one another.[136]

This is an important ontological distinction because it presumes always the potential for Mitda-sein's authentic response of care. Heidegger characterizes the authentic response of concern pertaining to "...the existence of the other, and not to a *what* which it takes care of, helps the other to become transparent to himself *in* the care and *free for* it." By this Heidegger comes close to our previous conceptions of compassion. Heidegger sees Mitda-sein's authentic mode of concern as an impulse to liberate which stands in opposition to a controlling or paternalistic concern. This 'taking care of' is the authentic form of Mitda-sein insofar as it is the proper mode of Da-sein's being with others.

> ...being-with-others belongs to the being of Da-sein, with which it is concerned in its very being. As being-with, Da-sein 'is' essentially for the sake of others. But when actual, factical Da-sein does not turn to others and thinks that it does not need them, or misses them, It is in the mode of being with. In being-with as the existential for-the-sake-of-others, these others are already disclosed in Da-sein.[137]

---

[135] Heidegger believes animals are 'world poor' and that our experience of them is not the same as our experience of Dasein. This claim has long been a controversial aspect of Heidegger's thought particularly by those who support a radically egalitarian view of animal/human relationships and see this as Heidegger's attempt at establishing an anthropocentric value system. However it is unclear to me that this 'world-poor' classification is any moral justification for the ill-treatment of animals. There is an extended discussion of this in Heidegger's *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Pp.201-64

[136] Ibid. §122

[137] Ibid. §123

Thus, when the question of empathy arises, Heidegger does not face the traditional problems which stem for the subject-object dualism. As Da-sein's existential foundation is world-constituted there is no separation, no gap between persons. As Da-sein is Mitda-sein, there is no need to 'feel oneself into the other', no need to explain 'empathy' as this relationship is already laid over a more fundamental understanding. Being-with constitutes what Heidegger refers to as a "primordial existential kind of being" which does not require a conceptual bridge between Da-sein and others, rather it is through Da-sein's relationship to others that it finds its own authentic identification. This experience for Heidegger essentially constitutes self knowledge.

> Being towards others is not only an autonomous irreducible relationship of being, as being-with it already exists with the being of Da-sein. Of course, it is indisputable that a lively mutual acquaintanceship on the basis of being-with often depends on how far one's own Da-sein has actually understood itself, but this means that it depends only upon how far one's essential being with others has made it transparent and not disguised itself. This is possible only if Da-sein as being-in-the-world is always already with others. "Empathy" does not first constitute being-with, but is first possible on its basis, and is motivated by the prevailing modes of being-with in their inevitability.[138]

It is clear then that Heidegger has a strong critique of the limits of empathy as traditionally conceived. His vision is made complete by suggesting that the question of empathy or fellow feeling can be resolved by assuming or more correctly recognizing that the relationships between persons is primordial, or pre-cognitive in Scheler's terminology. As this relationship is the source of our bond between persons as well as the source of our own character or nature, the question of maintaining a clear perception of this source becomes essential for Heidegger. The authentic mode of existence becomes manifest only through the recognition of that same existence. Heidegger has some suggestions about how best to nurture these modes of being, but none can be clearly articulated outside his phenomenological conceptual realm. If Heidegger's robust ontology provides for us the clearest foundation of compassion in the form of authentic being-with, does he also provide the answer as to how we can encourage the manifestation of this authentic mode of being? This question must be taken up in time.

Schopenhauer and the Phenomenologists

What is important to take away from the phenomenological accounts of compassion is the sense that they might provide an alterative to both the psychological accounts that they both criticize so strongly, as well as the metaphysical account of compassion Schopenhauer adopts as a means of last resort. In similar fashion to the Christian and Buddhist accounts, Scheler and Heidegger provide a devastating critique of the psychological accounts of compassion. They demonstrate the failure of the psychologists to use good empirical observation and clearly show the false premises underlying the initial assumptions of the psychological account.

---

[138] Ibid. §125

More importantly, I believe the phenomenological accounts clearly show a possible third alternative to the dichotomy Schopenhauer establishes between the psychological and metaphysical accounts of compassion. If we had no metaphysical convictions, we might be persuaded by the phenomenological picture, but again, the metaphysical substance of the picture might only be set aside or bracketed. Although I do not believe the phenomenological picture clearly disqualifies Schopenhauer's metaphysical turn, it does allow one to discuss the nature of precognitive recognition and other problems without immediately appealing to metaphysics. I believe it is also the most robust of the accounts of actual being-in-the-world of all previous accounts considered and therefore has other merits apart from its being the most comprehensive picture of compassion or not.

Another merit of the phenomenological conception is the ability of it to coincide with the other ontological pictures, in a sense, filling them out in ways that they often fail to articulate themselves, choosing instead to focus of the potential and manifestations of compassion in general. There is nothing in principle to say that Schopenhauer would not have entertained a phenomenological approach. In many ways his philosophy is a precursor to Western existentialism in both content and in method. Schopenhauer did have a certain apprehension about the ability of introspection to provide a privileged viewpoint of the self and there is still an ongoing debate as to the extent that he would the substance of a first-party perspective. What he would certainly be satisfied with, however, is strong indifference and potential denial of the supposed transparency of the ego. Schopenhauer, Scheler, and Heidegger, all recognize the illusory nature of the ego and its relationships both visible and concealed of the self to others. It is only through the practice of disciplined introspection do these aspects of the self and even deeper sources reveal themselves. It is precisely this practice that we turn to now.

Section 3: Schopenhauer Redux

In this section I will attempt to re-evaluate some aspects Schopenhauer's theory of compassion in light of my discussion of the psychological and ontological formulations in chapters three and four. My general aim is to re-evaluate several questionable conclusions Schopenhauer arrives at in *On the Basis of Morality*. At the same time, I hope to provide some continuity with both the substance and spirit of Schopenhauer's view. I am therefore bound in this sense to suggest revisions that he might have approved of in principle, were he aware of the relevant options at the time. At the same time, I hope to make Schopenhauer's theory of compassion appear to be more reasonable or, if I am successful enough, a legitimate philosophical account of compassion. We must keep in mind that at the time of its articulation, Schopenhauer was not apprised of all the relevant data he required to complete the project he set out to. This is especially true in the first volume of *World as Will*. In the second volume, and in subsequent writing[139], he confesses his amazement at his system's correspondence with written sources describing Buddhist beliefs and various other religious accounts. He took this correspondence as direct evidence of the veridicality of his fundamental assumptions concerning the nature of reality and the inescapable effects of the will. It is my goal then to address some criticisms from the secondary sources and several of my own in order to resolve a working or at least philosophical coherent theory of compassion. At the same time I hope to keep alive Schopenhauer's spirit of observation and example as the sole criterion for the justification of theorizing.

Chapter 5: Rethinking Compassion

I believe that each contributor of either an ontological or psychological account discussed in the previous chapters brings some significant aspect to bear on our re-reading of Schopenhauer. What I hope to do in this chapter is first show how I believe each of these contemporary accounts enriches Schopenhauer's conception of compassion and secondly, how, considered together, they can be used to overcome critical problems that exist in Schopenhauer's original account. I am particularly concerned with Schopenhauer's restrictive distinction between the metaphysical and psychological conceptions of compassion as well as his deterministic conception of character. I will begin this section with the specific contributions and end with the re-visitation of Schopenhauer's central problems.

---

[139] Parerga and Paralipomena, Volumes 1&2.

Rationality and Compassion

There is one particular aspect each psychological account of compassion has in common. From Cartwright to Nussbaum, there is a strong tendency for the psychological accounts to qualify the experience of compassion with a strong rational foundation. As Nussbaum claims, this characterization of compassion can be traced back to Aristotle. I do not believe it is inaccurate to claim that in the psychological conceptions, although compassion is characterized as an emotion, it is grounded in or mediated by reason. The particular qualification of reasonableness is usually played out in the judgment of the seriousness of the suffering we respond to compassionately. As I have already shown, this distinction is meant to play on our intuition that some suffering is more serious than others, i.e. a scraped knee warrants less compassion than a severed limb. The lack of such a distinction for the psychological conception would result in the notion of compassion being too broadly conceived. What I mean by this is that we might have a difficult time choosing whom to feel compassion for and subsequently, because we have spread ourselves too thinly by responding with compassion indiscriminately, have too few resources to help those in 'real need'.

Schopenhauer admits the need for rationality in his conception of compassion. However, he still sees compassion as the ground of all moral action including the first cardinal virtue, justice. Schopenhauer claims that reason serves as the guide or path from which flows the source of justice in both the prohibitive sense (not to harm others) and a broader sense of wisdom to guide actions. In this regard, it seems like the two accounts are fundamentally at odds, with the psychological account of compassion being grounded entirely in reason and Schopenhauer's account of justice (utilizing reason) as action being grounded in compassion. What is at question here is the possibility of the psychological accounts attribution of the role of reason being incorporated to function within Schopenhauer's theory. I suggest that neither Schopenhauer's account nor the psychological accounts are in themselves feasible, and will argue for a third interpretation.

First we must ask, however, why and in what regard Schopenhauer's theory of justice is inadequate? Recall too that I have also argued the psychological accounts role of reason are fundamentally flawed. I do not believe they can function adequately to describe compassion as it stands. Neither, however, does Schopenhauer's account fit with many of our intuitions concerning justice. The psychological conceptions were flawed if we recall, because the employment of reason to judge the legitimacy of suffering served to primarily disarm the authentic experience of compassion. If we believe that the legitimacy of suffering must be established by reason, then the particular eudaimonistic conception of an individual will necessarily prevent the appropriate emotional response, perhaps not from occurring, but from manifesting itself into consciousness and motivating the individual into action. Reason, or more correctly, 'rationalizing', in this sense, serves to harden our hearts and only extend a spontaneous emotional reaction to those who 'deserve' it. As we can see, the eudaimonistic conception

of an individual might have nothing to do with reason at all, and certainly might be susceptible to propaganda, social structures and values, bigotry, greed, etc. If our pre-theoretical emotional responses are conceptually filtered, there is no telling what becomes lost in the process. For Schopenhauer, this is basically the role of character. Regardless of our base emotional responses, our socialization and prejudices will always colour our world.

Schopenhauer's theory suffers some inadequacies, but is not as flawed as the psychological conception. However, there are still problematic aspects that require addressing. First, the requirement that compassion lie at the root of justice does not seem to serve the same role as the argument that compassion lie at the root of morality. Justice and morality are often run together as being two branches of the same limb, however, this may only be a preconception based on the philosophical claim that they share the same source. This source, if we recall, for the philosopher Schopenhauer is criticizing in *On the Basis of Morality*, is rationality. For Kant, Mill, and almost every other moral philosopher after, rationality has occupied the role of source for all normative theory both social and political. Schopenhauer's response to this is to reject rationality's foundational claim entirely. I believe his mistake here is to throw the baby out with the bath water. If we believe that reason is the ground of morality, it is clear how it must follow that it naturally also be the ground of social theory and justice. Once emancipated, however, moral theory need not imply social theory. Schopenhauer fails to disconnect the two disciplines for two reasons. First is his idiosyncratic conception of justice grounded in compassion. The primary role of justice, for Schopenhauer, is to prevent us from harming others, and subsequently, if we recall, the primary role of ethics is the motivate us to help others. However, if we appeal to a modern and well accepted conception of justice like John Rawls' conception of justice as fairness, we see a radically different conception and subsequent grounding than Schopenhauer's characterization.

Second, it is certainly not the case that Schopenhauer's theory of compassion can work at the centre of the conception of justice as fairness, nor should it however. Schopenhauer, in an attempt to absolve himself from the Kantian moral tradition has simply extended his good intuition into a realm that he need not. There is not a secondary source that presents a sympathetic reading of Schopenhauer's claim about justice. Magee, Cartwright, Atwell, Young, and Copleston all criticize Schopenhauer's attempt at grounding justice in compassion. I believe, however, that his conception can be saved by simply refusing the natural extension of the ground of morality to the ground of justice. There is no reason for Schopenhauer that justice cannot be grounded in reason and morality in compassion. His distinction between the two cardinal virtues may not survive this rendering; however it is clear that there are better and more appropriate distinctions to be made here.

I believe that the weakness of both Schopenhauer's original conception and the psychological conception stem from the attempt to reduce an emotional

phenomena to rational criteria and vice versa. My suggestion for the reformulation of Schopenhauer's old conception of compassion looks like this: Following the Buddhist distinction between compassion (*karuna*) and wisdom (*prajna*), I believe Schopenhauer's picture can be revised to show that the cardinal virtues exemplified in Buddhist thought work seamlessly into his metaphysics as well as his theory of action. Schopenhauer has no reason to hold that justice and morality stem from the same root, especially since he believes that rationality is essential to the administration of justice. In this new sense, compassion itself, or the experience of the suffering of another, is a cardinal virtue in and of itself. It cannot be reduces or submit to any external criteria if it is to manifest itself freely in an authentic fashion. On the other hand, the role of justice can have a rational ground, subject to principled thinking and conceptual criteria, under the greater heading of wisdom. If we conceive of justice in the Rawlsian sense, or any other systematic sense, then wisdom is required to fill in the greater obligation of an individual to understand the boundaries within which he or she acts. Schopenhauer characterized wisdom this way as well, as understanding the causal nexus we exist within combined with the ability to anticipate the ramifications of our actions.

In this sense, the two cardinal virtues work in unison to provide the ground for moral action; compassion to motivate the moral response to suffering, and wisdom to guide the action. I believe this formulation avoids the pitfalls of the psychological conception of compassion and also provides for a coherent, modern conception of justice and action that is not required to submit to Schopenhauer's reduction. More importantly, it reflects the necessary requirements for a compassionate response to be effective. An example of both principles at work might be understood in the practice of raising a dog. Dogs are domestic animals, which means they require human intervention to sustain their well-being. When dogs come into our lives, they immediately invoke an emotional response to their situation of helplessness. Their seemingly undying devotion also serves to strengthen the bond between human and animal. It is through this compassionate response that we are motivated to care for and nurture the dog and come to see its well-being as important to us. However, this powerful emotion is not enough. If we fail to make an effort to understand the psychology of the animal, if our response to its seeming insatiable hunger and demands for attention are simply responses from empathy, regardless of our intentions and well-wishes, the dog will not grow to be an acceptable member of the community.

> The ability to deal with dogs, our fellow human beings, and even ourselves in self-examination doesn't just come naturally. It isn't inherited genetically. It is an acquired skill, a body of acquired skills. We have to learn how to do these things. First, we have to have the intention, "Yes, I want to learn how to live with my fellow man in a better, more mature way. I want to learn how to live with my dog in a better, more satisfying way." However, the good intention isn't enough. You have to have the knowledge of what to do and when to do it. You must then practice these skills in an efficient manner so that you

> are successful. If this approach is followed, the art of raising a dog or a puppy can be acquired by anybody.[140]

The essence of good dog-raising is a combination of both the emotional bond between human and animal and also the wisdom that seeks to understand the nature of the dog and how they function as members of a pack. This wisdom tells us that unabated doting will not result in a well-adjusted dog at all, but may result in serious behavioural problems. Despite our well-wishing and love, coming to live peacefully with a dog requires the wisdom to understand what the dog's nature is. Once this is realized, the dog can become socialized like a dog. The animal can become an integral member of a pack and assume her role within.

This example is meant to show how these two virtues are essential in everyday aspects of our existence. When our ability to feel compassion is allowed the freedom to manifest itself, our moral community is automatically extended. How we respond to this new responsibility is a question of understanding the potential efficacy of our actions. Does this distinction explain the problem of the legitimacy of suffering? It does in this way: we must admit, like Schopenhauer, that suffering is universal in scope and had its roots in desire. In this sense, suffering is the same as it comes from the same source. The suffering we experience most intimately is our own, and as a result of that, we tend to attribute it more attention and more significance. The answer to the taxation of considering all the suffering we encounter is not to simply block it out or refuse to recognize it. Rather, we must respond to it in our capacity as moral agents, not only to experience this suffering, but to help remedy it. The interesting aspect of this scenario lies in each individual's eudaimonistic worldview. On can have a Stoic response to suffering, a cynical response, a spiritual response, a material response. The correctness of the particular response in this case will depend on its correspondence with the worldview one has adopted. Nussbaum paraphrases Marcus Aurelius unique understanding of suffering.

> ...we are to think of the suffering of others as like the sufferings of a child who has lost a toy—they are real enough, and worthy of our concern, but only in the way that we would console a child, not because we ourselves think that the loss of a toy is really a large matter.[141]

Not all wisdom about suffering will have such a uniform doctrine, for what we understand of the character of the patients of our compassion will define much of the response to it. In this way, compassion need not always be kind, it may be hard or even seem callous. If the goal of compassion is the remedy of suffering, there is not one specific face of compassion. That is the strength of this new picture. The fear of the psychological conception was that if rationality did not adjudicate the legitimacy of suffering, then compassion would become mere sentimentality. We see that compassion can take on a mature face, however, if we

---

[140] The Monks of New Skete, *The Art of Raising a Puppy*. Pg. 4
[141] Nussbaum, Martha. *Upheavals of Thought*. Pg.324

understand the necessary effects of our actions.[142] The power of compassion in this picture is exhibited in its freedom and spontaneity. We are called often to act in difficult ways, to say difficult things. True moral responses come from an authentic recognition of another's suffering and the wisdom to encourage a means to its ultimate resolution. We see from a thinker like Aurelius, a stoic view that suffering is not a question of degrees and that all suffering stems from one root. His compassionate response, therefore, is to counsel the victim spiritually, philosophically. This response is much different than the response of the good Samaritan. Neither of these responses, however, can be said to be more appropriate that the other. They both reflect the unique response of compassion combined with wisdom.

I hope the resolution I have suggested to incorporate the psychologist's emphasis on reason with Schopenhauer's questionable characterization of justice has been successful. I do not see it as compromising Schopenhauer's greater philosophical system. Rather, as his claim has always been that reason is a tool of the will, if we will towards others in this conception, we best understand how to resolve the particular suffering with a greater understanding of the world.

The Metaphysical and the Psychological

As we have seen in our overview of the various commentators and critics of Schopenhauer, one common objection concerns his commitment that compassion be grounded metaphysically. There are various takes on where exactly the problem lies with this picture, but one overwhelming objection is that if we don't share a Schopenhauerian metaphysics, then his theory of compassion makes no sense. Even with the most charitable reading, I believe this criticism is true. Schopenhauer, himself, would have no problem with this criticism for he was first, quite happy to understand his philosophy as being a unified whole, and second, saw metaphysics as the only last resort to explain an undeniable empirical condition (compassion). However, it is the goal of this project to bring forward a revised account of compassion that is resilient to more contemporary criticism. Since there are few philosophers who would actually consider themselves to be Schopenhauerians, it is our goal in this section to re-think the metaphysical foundation of compassion.

There are two ways I believe we can reconsider the Schopenhauer's foundation of compassion. The first is to offer a pragmatic solution which amounts to the rejection of the question of 'ground', and the second is to provide an alternative ground. In this chapter and the next, I will offer both. I first describe what the pragmatic solution might look like and defer the actual account of it to the next chapter. In the *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer is concerned with the ground of compassion first to establish a structure describing what he believed to be the scarcity of true moral action. As he describes his theory of action, the role

[142] Recall the Zen parable of the deer.

of the will and our determined character, the manifestation of compassion seems to become less and less a probable occurrence. Although his account of willing also has a metaphysical ground, Schopenhauer maintains for the most part that our experience of the will comes only from its manifestation in the world. From experience we come to realize that the will that governs our actions, as well as the will we observe in others, seems only to act for the benefit of itself. Ethics, if conceived of as action for another, does not seem possible. But, as Schopenhauer claims, we do on occasion witness actions that are undoubtedly unselfish. This paradoxical state of affairs Schopenhauer claims is the mystery of ethics. Schopenhauer first posits his metaphysical explanation as a possible solution to this mystery.

It follows from this that if we can provide an alternative explanation of how an agent becomes motivated to and is able to act for another's benefit, then the metaphysical explanation becomes superfluous and can be foregone, or at least, we have good reason for indifference to it. This is the case because the primary function of the metaphysical ground was to explain how compassion is in principle, in an ordinary sense, improbable. I call this the pragmatic solution because it chooses to focus on the problem of how to become compassionate rather that to describe how compassion might be grounded. In this sense, the pragmatic solution is closer to Schopenhauer spirit as expressed in *On the Basis of Morality*, as he admits that he writes his metaphysical account with some trepidation. The full exposition of the pragmatic account will proceed in the next chapter as we follow Schopenhauer's clues as to how exactly one can experience the cessation of selfish willing (the necessary condition for compassion).

The alternative approach to avoiding the metaphysical foundation of compassion is to provide an alternative ground that does not share the same commitments or presuppositions as the metaphysical conception. I believe that our description of Heidegger's and Scheler's phenomenological accounts does exactly this. First, Schopenhauer turns to the metaphysical account to avoid the necessary problems he identifies with any possible version of the psychological approaches to compassion. Even if we do not agree with Schopenhauer's assessment of psychology, the phenomenological accounts put forward what I consider to be the final nail in the coffin of any empathetic or imaginative account of compassion. In this case, although this is not a good reason to believe them, the phenomenological accounts are the only game in town when it comes to satisfactorily describing the experience or phenomenon of compassion.

To consider the potential of a phenomenological account serving as a satisfactory ground of a greater Schopenhauerian picture of compassion, we must ask, what did Schopenhauer demand of the metaphysical ground, and can the phenomenological account satisfy these demands? I have mentioned that Schopenhauer was apprehensive about the inclusion of a metaphysics in the

On the Basis of Morality. This is partially because he believed his explanation could stand without one, and partially because he was skeptical of metaphysical explanations being at all satisfactory. He claims:

> Just as at the end of every investigation and of every exact science the human mind stands before a primary phenomenon, so too does it in the case of ethics. It is true that this primary phenomenon explains everything that is comprehended under it and follows from it, but it itself remains unexplained, and lies before us like a riddle. And so here too we see a demand for a system of metaphysics, in other words, for a final explanation of primary phenomena as such, and, when these are taken collectively, of the world. Here also this demand raises the question of why that which exist, and is understood, is as it is, and not otherwise; and the question of how the exhibited character of the phenomenon results from the essence-in-itself of things.[143]

It seems that Schopenhauer insists on providing a metaphysics for two reasons. First, to justify his empirical observation and general theory of ethics, and second, to satisfy a craving he identifies as a sort of universal longing to ask greater questions about the nature of existence. The second reason does not seem to be particularly important to Schopenhauer's conception of compassion in general, it is perhaps entirely peripheral to it. The first qualification seems to be entirely possible for a phenomenological conception to fulfill. If we recall, like Schopenhauer, the phenomenological accounts both begin with a prolonged attack on both the psychology and psychologism of compassion. What Schopenhauer seems to strive for in positing in a metaphysics is the transcendence of the subject/object distinction and the immediate communication of fellow-feeling or identification between the participants in a compassionate relationship. This seems to be his fundamental requirement and function of the metaphysical explanation as he reiterates it several times. Notice, there is nothing exclusive to a metaphysical conclusion. All he requires is that his observations concerning the manifestations of compassion are done justice by the explanation of their ground.

I suggest that with either the description of a pre-theoretical identification of fellow-feeling as found in Scheler's account, or Heidegger's account of Da-sein's ontological openness tp others, we have an ideal substitution for Schopenhauer's metaphysical thesis. The phenomenological accounts give us the description of an unmediated, pre-cognitive form of identification between individuals that does not impose an intentional intellectual action like imagination or conceptualization. These are precisely the aspects of the psychological accounts that Schopenhauer chose to respond to with the metaphysical thesis. I cannot help but think that in some respects he would have much sooner avoided positing the metaphysics at all. In this sense, we can safely assume that the phenomenological picture fulfills the role of the metaphysical for the purposes we have deemed necessary.

Another strength of the phenomenological picture that Schopenhauer's conception is missing involves the intimate connection between individuals that always and already exists before a 'mysterious' connection through compassion. There is

---

[143] Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The Basis of Morality*. Pg.200

much evidence first through the phenomenological conceptions themselves and secondly through secondary evidence from psychological sources and others, that there exists a fundamental emotional connection between human beings that is not the result of cognitive functioning, but far deeper processes. We have already discussed the example suggested by V.S. Ramachandran, I will suggest now three other sources that push towards this explanation. On a biological/evolutionary level, the philosopher Elliot Sober and David Wilson have claimed recently that there is growing evidence to suggest that evolutionary theories once necessary postulation of selfishness is questionable at best. In their book *Unto Others*, they make a strong case for the evolutionary explanation of unselfish behaviour. Alfie Kohn, in his book *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, uses several hundred experiments from psychology and other social sciences to argue against the idea that human beings as social animals have any fundamental tendencies towards aggressive or selfish behaviour. On the contrary, Kohn provides a convincing argument that, provided there are no mitigating circumstances, the natural tendency of human beings is an altruistic one more often than not. A final indication comes from Lt. Dave Grossman's book, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. Grossman claims that not only are human beings naturally non-violent, but have a profound aversion towards violence. His evidence is based on military studies from the time of the American civil war onwards. His claim is that up until the Vietnam war, it was uncommon for any more than twenty percent of combat troops actually to fire a weapon at an enemy. Even under extreme coercion and threats, the number never grew significantly higher. It was not until military training included the necessary psychological desensitization of the soldier and de-humanization of the enemy did the numbers ever grow to militarily 'acceptable' levels, seventy percent and higher.

Although Schopenhauer was happy to believe that social constraints help our natural compulsions to harm others in check, it seems clear from all the available evidence that human beings are not as likely, as Schopenhauer suspects, to harm each other even when given the opportunity to do so with impunity. Adopting the phenomenological account of the ground of compassion allows not only to avoid a suspect metaphysics, it allows us a more realistic interpretation of the nature of human relationships. What we hope to provide in a theory of compassion, as Schopenhauer did, is a picture of human nature that is realistic and supportive of empirical evidence. Much more that Schopenhauer's original account, Heidegger's and Scheler's phenomenological accounts provide both.

The previous examples are meant to show how Schopenhauer's pessimism concerning the natural tendency of human beings was somewhat inappropriate. That is not to say that compassion is abundant. In fact, Schopenhauer's qualitative distinction between the virtues of not harming and helping seems to be justified here with the evidence that although compassion is rare, natural prohibitive justice, in Schopenhauer's sense, is not. I believe that the phenomenological accounts provide a natural account of this prohibitive justice,

or aversion towards harming other, by positing an ever present underlying relationship to those we dwell among.

Compassion and Justice

One of the main themes running through both the Christian and Buddhist accounts of compassion is compassion's active role, i.e. relieving suffering and doing justice. Thich Nhat Hanh refers to this aspect as engaged Buddhism. Theologians like Sobrino, Boff, and Fox refer to this aspect of compassion as justice making. This active component of compassion is the fundamental distinction between sentimental emotions like pity and empathy, and true compassion which is the recognition of suffering combined with the urge to relieve it. In both the Christian and Buddhist accounts, compassion functions as the motivation to identify with those who suffer and help them. In this way, compassion is understood in a normative sense. By this I mean, compassion is an emotion or an experience that we as moral agents are meant to encourage or nurture. Without the ability to intentionally manifest or nurture compassion, it would seem that the role of the emotion could have no significance to morality whatsoever. Dana Radcliff identifies this problem clearly in her paper "Compassion and Commanded Love".

> Biblical evidence suggests that, commanded to love one's neighbor as oneself, a Christian is required to develop the disposition to feel compassion for others and to be motivated by it to caring action. But, should the "love commandment" also be seen to oblige a Christian to *feel* compassion as the requisite motive to helping behavior in certain specific situations of human need?[144]

Here lies one of the most important problems, not only concerning the nature of compassion, but concerning moral philosophy in general. The larger question at hand is how does one motivate oneself, or become motivated, to act morally. In our case, if we posit the ground of morality to be compassion, the questions simply transforms into, how do we become compassionate? In *On the Basis of Morality,* Schopenhauer's answer, of course, is that we cannot teach someone to become moral, or to become compassionate. Because our characters are determined and unchanging in our lifetimes, and because we act always in accordance with our characters, it is impossible to learn to be or grow to be compassionate. Schopenhauer certainly admits that compassion exists, but only insofar as it is an inherent property of an individual character, and unfortunately, these characters are all too rare.

This problem exists not only in philosophy, but for any tradition that demands of its adherents that they become moral beings, or at least extend moral consideration. Unfortunately, often the suggested methods of becoming compassionate occur within religious practice, traditionally conceived. While this may offer some hope for the solution of the problem to the religious, for the

[144] Radcliff, Dana. "Compassion and Commanded Love". Pg. 50

philosophically minded, or the agnostic, religious practice does not offer much hope to a secular ethic. Religious answers then, if they cannot be readily translated into secular practice, regardless of their efficacy, must for now be set aside.

Of course Kant and all previous and subsequent moral philosophers have suggested accounts of how we might be motivated to behave morally, but Schopenhauer, more or less convincingly, undermines these approaches in the first part of *On the Basis of Morality*. Rationality and argumentation has no effect on the will for Schopenhauer, they fail to motivate or move the will as reason is simply a tool of the will to begin with.

> For virtue does indeed result from knowledge, but not from abstract knowledge communicable through words. If this were so, virtue could be taught, and by expressing here in the abstract its real nature and the knowledge at its foundation, we should have ethically improved everyone who comprehended this. But this is by no means the case. On the contrary, we are as little able to produce a virtuous person by ethical discourses or sermons as all the systems of aesthetics from Aristotle downwards have ever been able to produce a poet.[145]

Our understanding and representative knowledge can have no effect on the will, they are its instruments, not its guides. Compassion and virtue can only become manifest through the sublimation of our will. If our will is as capricious and deterministic as Schopenhauer believes, there is no hope to ever become more virtuous that we are by birth. If we recall, Schopenhauer believes also that this has been the majority opinion for the entire history of philosophy. In this regard, he does not believe that this statement is particularly unconventional.

However, in his master work *World as Will and Representation*, we begin to sense, ever so slightly, a backing off from this purely deterministic picture. This is not to suggest that his opinion on the matter has actually changed as the *On the Basis of Morality* is actually written between the first and second publication and volumes of *World as Will and Representation*. What I suggest is that, even though *On the Basis of Morality* presents a coherent picture of Schopenhauer's notion of compassion, it does not refer to his grander metaphysics, probably due to the purpose of its creation (a contest with anonymous submissions). In *World as Will and Representation*, we begin to see a slight glimmer of hope that the deterministic picture of compassion is not the entire story.

> Genuine goodness of disposition, disinterested virtue, and pure nobleness of mind, therefore, does not come from abstract knowledge; yet they do come from knowledge. But it is a direct and intuitive knowledge that cannot be reasoned away or arrive at by reasoning; a knowledge that just because it is not abstract, cannot be communicated, but must dawn on each of us. It therefore finds its real and adequate expression not in words, but in the course of a man's life.[146]

---

[145] WWR 1 Pg.368
[146] WWR 1 Pg.370

Again we see Schopenhauer appealing to the substantial character of an individual as the sole arbiter of her moral standing, but more interestingly, he is also attributing goodness and disposition as having grounds in knowledge. Again in the following passage we see a similar suggestion,

> Morality without argumentation and reasoning, that is, mere moralizing, cannot have any effect, because it does not motivate. But a morality that *does* motivate can only do so by acting on self-love. Now what springs from this has no moral worth. From this it follows that no genuine virtue can be brought about through morality and abstract knowledge in general, but that such virtue must spring from intuitive knowledge that recognizes in another's individuality the same inner essence as one's own.[147]

If we desire to revise Schopenhauer's account with the intention of it providing a description of compassion that is prescriptive or normative, we must follow up Schopenhauer clues here. What kind of knowledge can see through the 'veil of Maya' as Schopenhauer calls it, to understand the unity of beings i.e. the essence of oneself as the essence of another? What kind of knowledge could be responsible for the change in one's character? What kind of knowledge could motivate us to be compassionate?

If we wish to do justice to the Christian and Buddhist conceptions of compassion, and show how compassion can fulfill the notion of engaged justice making, we must show in the spirit of Schopenhauer's philosophy, how it is possible for an individual to nurture the experience of compassion. The following section will also account for what I have referred to as the pragmatic account of compassion. If we show how an individual can fulfill the authentic realization of compassion, following Schopenhauer spirit, we might be able to supplant the question of the ground.

Chapter 6: Schopenhauer's Theory of Salvation

> If the good or bad exercise of the will does alter the world, it can alter only the limits of the world, not the facts—not what can be expressed by means of human language.
> In short the effect must be that it becomes an altogether different world. It must, so to speak, wax and wane as a whole.
> The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man.
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus)

For Schopenhauer, the section concerning salvation is the culmination of the *World as Will and Representation*, and for him, its logical conclusion. It is also his most misunderstood section and until recently has only been given peripheral attention in the secondary literature. While the topic of salvation has often been

---

[147] Schopenhauer, Arthur. *World as Will and Representation.* Vol. 1 Pg.368

overlooked for more traditional epistemic and metaphysical issues, Schopenhauer certainly did not downplay it himself. In WWR volume 1, the final sections of book four deal exclusively with the doctrines of salvation and the denial of the will-to-live. In volume two, Schopenhauer returns to these topics, again to end the volume in the sections *On the Doctrine of the Denial of the Will to Live*, and *The Road to Salvation*. The title of these final sections might seem unusual, especially for a philosopher who was a devout atheist. If wish to understand how the notion of 'salvation' is being used here, we must investigate what exactly Schopenhauer believes we are being saved from, and how this salvation might come about.

Schopenhauer's theory of salvation allows us to understand his philosophical system as pessimistic rather that nihilistic. Schopenhauer was a pessimist to be sure and his philosophy carried the tone of his pessimism. There is much debate surrounding the precise nature of his pessimism especially whether or not his renowned gruff personality simply wore off on the expression of his thinking. I believe the correct interpretation, although Schopenhauer was certainly himself a curmudgeon, is that his philosophy is by its own nature fundamentally pessimistic.

First, he sees the fundamental nature of human existence as a never ending loop of suffering and desire. His belief in this fact was only buttressed by the discovery of its complete consistency with Buddhist and later, Christian views of life as he interpreted them. Human beings, as embodiments of an insatiable will, have no choice but to follow the will via the character wherever one is taken and have no option but to follow a necessary path of suffering that unfolds before them. Of course, there is no satisfying the desire that is constantly changing and transforming from one incarnation to another. Therefore, human life is a constant cycle of suffering, only complimented by the knowledge of our eventual and inevitable demise.

Second, as we already understand, Schopenhauer sees no room for moral theory as means for emancipation from the process of our own willing. As reason is simply a tool of the will, it cannot motivate us to choose one course of action over another. It may show the will a more cunning or thoughtful means to an end, but it cannot will for another which is Schopenhauer's definition of morality. There is some question as to the exact nature of pessimism Schopenhauer avows. In his paper "Schopenhauer's Pessimism and the Unconditioned Good"[148], Mark Migotti makes an interesting distinction between metaphysical pessimism and a pessimism of choice, both positions having been attributed to Schopenhauer. Since to be metaphysical must necessarily imply some form of nomological property and since Schopenhauer actually believes in the potential of salvation, pessimism cannot be the law; rather, it must be the convention. It is this sense of pessimism that allows Schopenhauer the freedom one needs to be saved.

---

[148] Schopenhauer's Pessimism and the Unconditioned Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995)

From what we understand of Schopenhauer, then, it is easy to imagine his philosophical system as not simply pessimistic but nihilistic. Although all along he seems to recognize the existence of value and the possibility of transcendence in intellectual, artistic, and moral realms, he denies all traditional explanations of how individuals might attempt to reach these lofty goals consistently. Schopenhauer's system would indeed be nihilistic if it were not for his explanation of how the individual overcomes what Schopenhauer refers to as the will-to-live. Here the will-to-live is to be understood as the incarnation or embodiment of the noumenal will, the force that drives all life on earth. We first encountered the will-to-live in the form selfish will in *On the Basis of Morality*. This will becomes manifest in the phenomenal realm via the character. As we discussed previously, however, Schopenhauer believes that the character is determined for the most part and simply follows the will. If Schopenhauer's story ended here, we would all live our lives as manifestations of the will, following our predestine path and suffering all the way to a predictable death. This is the nihilistic picture; no transcendence, no salvation, no morality, but simply endless willing and endless suffering ending with a meaningless death.

Schopenhauer's Theory of Salvation and the Denial of the Will-to-Live

The problem of life for Schopenhauer is the problem of the will. If it were not possible in some fashion to transcend the will, or if we did not accept Schopenhauer's thesis of salvation, we would indeed see in Schopenhauer's work a philosophy of nihilism. When there is willing, there is no compassion, no beauty, no genius. What Schopenhauer does in the section *On the Doctrine of the Denial of the Will-to-Live* is advance a thesis describing those rare occurrences of the will being transcended or, in his words, denied. There are several problems associated with advancing this thesis. The most difficult problem is presented in Schopenhauer's original metaphysics of the will. As we understand it from WWR, the will itself is unknowable as it exists outside representational or phenomenal realm. What we know of the will comes to us through our observation of its effects in the phenomenal world. According to John Atwell,

> For human beings, affirmation of the will engenders knowledge only of particular things (though, in virtue of reason, human beings can put these things into classes and thus devise concepts), hence of things subject to the principle of sufficient reason; it allows (or indeed necessitates) perceptions of things distinguished from each other by means of the *principium individuationis*; it makes all objects for the (individual) knowing subject potential motives, and thereby makes the human subject and human conduct un-free; it arouse in the human subject, at least now and again, a sense of the futility, vanity, transitoriness of life along with an intense fear of death.[149]

[149] Atwell, John. *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of the Will.* Pg. 154

For Schopenhauer the will is an essential aspect of all existence, both of sentient beings and inanimate structures of the world. As a noumenal force, the will does not submit to the principle of sufficient reason, it does not exist in the bounds of time and space, nor is it predicable, orderly, or purposeful. What we know of the will is known only through its effects in the world of representation, i.e. how it unfolds in different aspects of reality. Our characters, for instance, are determined insofar as they cannot change according to our choosing. They are precisely the manifestations of what Schopenhauer calls the will-to-live. As causal mechanisms, however, which are contingent and governed by sufficient reason, they lack freedom. As Bryan Magee puts it,

> I can choose whatever it is that I wish to choose, but I cannot will what it is that I wish to choose. As it has often been put, I can choose what I will but I cannot will what I will.[150]

However, as aspects of ourselves essentially determined by the will, we cannot know the content of characters in advance. We understand ourselves through time as the content of our characters are revealed to us. It is in this way that Schopenhauer claims we become wiser with age, but not necessarily better. We can learn to anticipate how we will act in different situations and perhaps avoid them, but our reactions will be fundamentally the same.

In his *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, Schopenhauer provides a glimpse into how freedom might be realized in his metaphysic. Although the first four parts of the essay provide a brilliant defense of determinism, Schopenhauer cleverly utilizes them to set the stage for the potential retrieval of freedom, if only in a very peculiar sense. Schopenhauer defines freedom negatively as the absence of any constraint of one's will to act. He recognized three aspects in which one can be considered free: physically, intellectually, and morally. Essentially, freedom is not realized in any of these domains due to the overwhelming influence of the will at work in each of them. Freedom only enters into consideration as a metaphysical possibility; by this Schopenhauer means through the Kantian distinction between the empirical character and the intelligible character. For Schopenhauer as well, our character has an empirical aspect and an intelligible aspect. The empirical or phenomenal aspect is knowable through the understanding, i.e. we can see the results of its manifestation. The intelligible aspect, however, is only manifest in the noumenal realm. In this respect, it cannot be determined as the free source of action per se, but as free in and of itself. We only come to believe that freedom is associated with the character insofar as we feel responsibility for our actions. With this feeling of responsibility, says Schopenhauer, must also accompany a subsequent notion of freedom. In this respect, although we could not have willed differently, our character itself may have been different. This is the limited sense in which Schopenhauer re-introduces the notion of freedom. 'That the character could have been otherwise' is enough for Schopenhauer to posit the feeling of responsibility that accompanies our actions and lives in our consciences.

---

[150] Magee, Bryan. *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. Pg.190

> In truth, real freedom, in other words, independence of the principle of sufficient reason, belongs to the will as thing-in-itself, not to its phenomenon, whose essential form is everywhere this principle of sufficient reason, the element of necessity. But the only case where that freedom can become immediately visible in the phenomenon is the one where it makes an end of what appears, and because there mere phenomenon, in so far as it is a link in the chain of causes, namely the living body, still continues to exist in time that contains only phenomena, the will, manifesting itself through the phenomenon, then in contradiction with it, since it denies what the phenomenon expresses.[151]

This freedom, in light of its mere transcendental character, has little interest to practical philosophy in any way. In fact, it does not make much sense until we see how it may make way for Schopenhauer's further claim that willing can be abdicated, if only temporarily.

It has already been established that a suppression of the will is required in the case of compassion, or perhaps more correctly, is the *occasion of compassion.* This holds true for Schopenhauer's theories of aesthetic appreciation and philosophical genius as well. What has not been clear is how one happens to realize this privileged state. One answer might be via the will. This is paradoxical, however. It is unclear that the will does, or can, will itself to not will. In *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer is clear that the character is a pure manifestation of the will. If this is the case, how then do these fleeting moments of cessation occur?

> ...the world as thing-in-itself, the identity of all beings, justice, righteousness, philanthropy, denial of the will-to-live, springs from one root. Now, as I have sufficiently shown, moral virtues spring from an awareness of that identity of all beings; this however, lies not in the phenomenon, but in the thing-in-itself, in the root of all beings. If this is the case, then the virtuous action is a momentary passing of through the point, the permanent return to which is the denial of the will-to-live. [152]

Schopenhauer claims that this denial of the will-to-live brings us closer to the essential nature of reality; it allows us to peer through the 'Veil of Maya'. The reference to this idealist notion in Brahman philosophy is ever present in *World as Will and Representation.* For Schopenhauer, the Kantian noumenal/phenomenal distinction was in a sense a rediscovery of Indian metaphysics. The distinction continues in the eastern tradition into the philosophy of the self. The Atman, or the great self, the ideal of a universal soul which is the common source of all things appealed to Schopenhauer and became an integral aspect in his own thought. We live a conventional reality in which our will is ever present, exerting its own force and compelling us to blindly follow. This conventional reality inevitably involves suffering as our will cannot rest, but continues to drive us in an insatiable appetite for pleasure and vice. It is in this state that we are furthest from the experience of compassion.

---

[151] WWR 1 Pg.402
[152] WWR II Pg.610

The suffering accompanying conventional reality serves a purpose, however. It allows us to look beyond, to search for an existence free from suffering. This is the starting point of all true religion according to Schopenhauer. This is the true nature of existence. If we see through the veil, if we come to understand that conventional reality is simply phenomenon, we gain our first glimpse into what might be a second option, a different path.

> Now, if seeing through the *principium individuationis*, if this direct knowledge of the identity of the will in all its phenomena, is present in a higher degree of distinctness, it will at once show an influence on the will which goes still farther. If that veil of Maya, the *principium individuationis,* is lifted from the eyes of a man to such an extent that he no longer makes the egotistical distinction between himself and the person of others, but takes as much interest in the sufferings of other individuals as his own, and thus is not only benevolent and charitable in the highest degree, but even ready to sacrifice his own individuality whenever several others can be saved thereby, then it follows automatically that such a man, recognizing in all beings his own true and innermost self, must also regard the endless sufferings of all that lives as his own, and thus takes upon himself the pain of the whole world.[153]

Here Schopenhauer indicates one possible manifestation of this special knowledge. By special I mean that it cannot be knowledge in the conventional sense. Our intellect can only grasp phenomenal truths, mediated by the principle of sufficient reason. What Schopenhauer is referring to is a direct or intuitive knowledge. This type of knowledge allows on to see through the veil, to understand and transcend the principle of individuation that separates man from man[154]. We are familiar with this process as the realization responsible for the manifestation of compassion. It is via the transcendence of conventional reality, of the empirical self, of the will-to-live[155] that allows us to conceive of another's suffering as our own and compels us to provide relief as we would for ourselves.

There is a sense, however, in which Schopenhauer believes that the denial of the will-to-live goes beyond the previously mentioned circumstances where we find the suppression of the individual will leading to extraordinary activities, i.e. compassion, aesthetic appreciation, contemplative genius. Schopenhauer believes there are certain historical circumstances in which an absolute denial of the will-to-live has occurred. Great controversy has sprung from the following passage in which we find Schopenhauer speaking as if there is another level or aspect to the denial of the will that submerges deeper into the self, or out of the self as it were. The distinction has been made in the secondary literature between the compassionate person and the saint, or mystic, one who has achieved full denial of the will-to-live.

> The phenomenon by which this becomes manifest is the transition from virtue to *asceticism*. In other words, it is no longer enough for him to love others like himself, and

---

[153] WWR 1 Pg.379

[154] sic.

[155] The phrase 'denial of the will-to-live' has connotations of suicide or of ending willing in some dramatic way. Schopenhauer clearly addresses this question and refutes suicide as a viable option for the cessation of the will. Rather he considers it the ultimate expression of willing.

> to do as much for them as for himself, but there arises in him a strong aversion to the inner nature whose expression is his own phenomenon, to the will-to-live, the kernel and the essence of that world recognized as full of misery. He therefore renounces precisely this inner nature, which appears in him and is expressed already by his body, and his action gives the lie to his phenomenon, and appears in open contradiction thereto. Essentially nothing but the phenomenon of the will, he ceases to will anything, guards against attaching his will to anything, tries to establish firmly in himself the greatest indifference to all things.[156]

Authors like Copleston, Magee, Cartwright, and Hamlyn interpret this passage to mean that included with the 'greatest indifference to all things' is also an indifference to fellow persons. This would make the ascetic seem to be a *different kind* of person that the compassionate person or the genius. Although there is some meager evidence for this interpretation, I do not agree with this assessment. However, I will finish this brief exegetical portion before considering these objections.

The most important aspect of the previous quote is the means by which Schopenhauer suggests that an individual resign himself from the effects of the will. He suggests that complete resignation from the will-to-live involves an ascetic turn, a turn towards the denial of all natural impulses, sexual gratification, and even the practice of bodily mortification. Schopenhauer takes his cue solely from the historical figures he admires and sees in them the common elements of denial, abstinence, and radical mortification.

> Thus it may be that the inner nature of holiness, of self-renunciation, of mortification of one's own will, of asceticism, is here for the first time expressed in abstract terms and free from everything mythical, as *denial of the will-to-live*, which appears after the complete knowledge of its own inner being has become for it the quieter of all willing. On the other hand, it has been known directly and expressed in deed by all those saints and ascetics who, in spite of the same inner knowledge, used very different language according to the dogma which their faculty of reason has accepted...[157]

For Schopenhauer, the ascetic is not actually struggling with the devil, sin, or other-worldly beings. Rather, the strictest path is left for the emancipation of ones own will, that which is closest to us but so difficult to deny. Again Schopenhauer speaks of inner, intuitive knowledge as being the quieter of the will. At times it is unclear as to which comes fist for Schopenhauer, the special knowledge, or the ascetic practice. In his clearer passages, it is the practice of asceticism that allows us to see, via this intuitive knowledge, through the veil to the being of our true selves.

> But my description, given above, of the denial of the will-to-live, or of the conduct of a beautiful soul, or a resigned and voluntary expiating saint, is only abstract and general, and therefore cold. As the knowledge from which results the denial of the will is intuitive and not abstract, it finds its complete expression not in abstract concepts, but only in the deed and in conduct. Therefore, in order to what more fully we express as

---

[156] WWR 1 Pg.380
[157] WWR 1 Pg.383

> denial of the will-to-live, we have to learn to know examples from experience and reality.[158]

One thing that may distinguish the ascetic individual and the moral individual is the claim to such intuitive knowledge. Schopenhauer claims that we understand the distinction, but we do not share the grasp as those who have experienced the distinction for themselves. In this sense, the term 'knowledge' is only used metaphorically. We cannot have knowledge in the ordinary sense of what the ascetic experiences. This is an important distinction because it allows Schopenhauer to avoid the paradox of willing. As we mentioned before, one cannot will not to will, and what we will is beyond our voluntary control. In a letter, Schopenhauer characterized the situation in the following way: Imagine a theater that is fully mechanized. All the actors perform the same play and dialogue over and over again. Although the characters have no freedom to diverge from any given path, we could imagine the entire mechanism stopping, not working. This is the experience of the ascetic. The character does not adopt a different will, but fails to will all together. The failure to will is granted by the experience of this intuitive knowledge. This knowledge provides an insight to the heretofore hidden nature of the reality of the self; the self unmediated by time, space, and individuality. This is also the self which has recognized true freedom. Only through the revelation of this form of knowledge do we come to realize the true transcendental character of this till-now impractical conception.

> True salvation, deliverance from life and suffering, cannot even be imagined without complete denial of the will. Till then, everyone is nothing but this will itself, whose phenomenon is a evanescent existence, an always vain and constantly frustrating striving, and the world full of suffering as we have described it...The great ethical difference of characters means that the bad man is infinitely remote from attaining that knowledge, whose result is the denial of the will, and is therefore in truth *actually* abandoned to all the mysteries which appear in life as *possible*.[159]

In this seeming paradox, Schopenhauer describes how the suffering caused by constant willing and indulgence of the will is responsible also for the concealment of the possible emancipation from the will. Schopenhauer does not shy away from the discussion of this seeming paradox. He believes and argues convincingly that there is a clear sense in that one can both deny the will-to-live and still remain a living, i.e. willing individual. Magee puts forth a criticism that although not unique, encompasses the general scope of the critic's objections to Schopenhauer's theory of the denial of the will-to-live. On the idea of the renunciation of the will, Magee writes:

> First, his denial that any of our actions or choices are free means that it is not an option for us. Second, he is insistent throughout that all motivated action the medium of motivations is the mind, whether conscious or unconscious, and that mind is the creature of the will in the literal sense that it was brought into being by the will and exists to serve it.[160]

---

[158] WWR 1 Pg.384
[159] WWR 1 Pg.397
[160] Magee, Bryan. Pg.242

Magee is not so much vexed by this apparent inconsistency as he is with the seeming incompatibility of the denial of the will with Schopenhauer's theory of compassion. Since these two theories seem to be the core of Schopenhauer's moral thinking, how can he suggest that on the one hand we renounce the will entirely, and on the other, we will-for-others? Although the secondary literature is particularly obtuse when it comes to granting Schopenhauer the benefit of the doubt in his attempt to resolve this problem, it is clear that he recognized it and identified it a precisely as any of his critics has.

> Now the contradiction between our assertions, on the one hand, of the necessity of the will's determinations through motives according to the character, and our assertions, on the other, of the possibility of the whole suppression of the will, whereby motives become powerless, is only the repetition in the reflection of philosophy of this real contradiction that arises from the direct encroachment of the freedom of the will-in-itself, knowing no necessity, on the necessity of the phenomenon. But the key to the reconciliation of these contradictions lies in the fact that the state in which the character is withdrawn from the power of motives does not proceed directly from the will, but from a changed form of knowledge.[161]

What seems to be the clearest interpretation of this passage goes as follows: ascetic practice results in a unique form of knowledge called intuitive knowledge. This special intuition does not provide understanding of the phenomenal world, rather it provides us a means of transcending the *principium individuationis* on to the recognition that the empirical self is illusory and we all participate in the same noumenal self. The difference between explaining this concept in language and understanding it intuitively is that the intuitive understanding allows us to renounce the will-to-live in a way that the will itself could not. This way Schopenhauer sees the paradox of the will as avoided. Denial of the will does is not motivated by the will, rather through a unique form of intuitive understanding. The character is no longer responsible from actions in this state, nor is it changed. It is simply withdrawn, it fails to exist in the same way.

John Atwell, far and above the expert in these matters, explains the resolution of the paradox this way:

> I am going to argue that in Schopenhauer's account of human salvation he allows us to make a fairly sharp break between willing and willing-to-live, and that despite first appearances, their nonidentity accords perfectly with nearly everything he actually says about (what I call) the 'roads to salvation'. Specifically, my argument is that in the various areas of human life where salvation can occur or be approached—namely, aesthetics, ethics, scholarship, and (to a much lesser extent) religion—*willing goes on*, though willing-to-live does not. (I should say, to speak more cautiously, that activity goes on; but since activity looks like willing, I use the more dramatic expression here.) The willing that goes on can be described in different ways in the different areas of its possible occurrence, but perhaps the most general description—one that fits all of the areas—is, I suggest, "objective"; accordingly, the will-to-live can be properly called "subjective". In certain areas, more precise descriptive terms will come to mind, such as

[161] WWR 1 Pg.403

> "disinterested" versus "instrumental", or "impartial" versus "egotistic", and so on. Even "spiritual" versus "bodily" might prove useful.[162]

Although this is a slight departure from Schopenhauer's formulation, Atwell's reading is clearly in line with the vast majority of Schopenhauer's work and commentary in these areas. It does make sense in a number of ways first, that the ethical person and the ascetic are exemplifying aspects of the same form of life and not living different lives. Schopenhauer is clearly committed to this idea and says as much when he claims that morality and asceticism "spring from one root". In Schopenhauer's own defense of his position, he attempts to show how his doctrine shares similarities with religious metaphors concerning grace and salvation. The ascetic suppression of the character is likened to the religious re-birth where physically the individual is the same but her character has been completely suppressed sometimes to the extent that he or she is considered another person (Paul's conversion from Saul on the road to Damascus). Schopenhauer calls this change the "divine effect of grace" as used in a religious sense, and the "direct expression of the freedom of the will" in his own philosophical sense. He sees these experiences as expressing the common element of all mysticism and transcendental experience. The utter negation of religious talk about God in Meister Eckhart expresses the same truth as the enlightenment tale of the Buddha. Both speak essentially of what cannot be spoken about. Both are free of the will in a transcendental sense.

Another reason given in the secondary sources to distinguish the ethical person from the ascetic is the duration of the cessation of the will. The ethical person, the intellectual, and the aesthetic contemplator all manifest their particular forms of detachment for short periods of time. The ascetic, according to Magee, for instance, is forever changed and indifferent to her own will. This is an interesting question and deserves some attention here. First, I believe, along with Atwell, that the ascetic and the moral person are participating in the same form of life to greater and lesser degrees. Much of this question has to do with the duration an enlightened ascetic remains in a state of diminished will-less-ness. Although while he seemed willing to admit that certain moral exemplars/saints were completely enlightened, he never allowed in principle for the absolute extinction of the will.

> However, we must not imagine that, after the denial of the will-to-live has once appeared through knowledge that has become a quieter of the will, such denial no longer waivers of falters, and that we can rest on it as on an inherited property. On the contrary, it must always be achieved afresh by constant struggle. For as the body is the will itself only in the form of objectivity, or as phenomenon in the world of representation, that whole will-to-live exists potentially so long as the body lives, an is always striving to reach actuality and to burn afresh with all its intensity.[163]

---

[162] Atwell, John. *Schopenhauer: The Human Character*. Pg.182
[163] WWR 1 Pg.391

This raises an interesting question. Does the saint or the enlightened ascetic remain in this state, or do they themselves struggle against the will eternally. Certainly much of the rhetoric and reflective writing of saints dwells in on the nature of sin and temptation. Is it important to think of enlightenment as a state in which we achieve full emancipation from the world of the will? Even Schopenhauer's characterization of the Buddha indicated a sense that his struggle continued through his life,

> He (the Buddha) therefore endures such ignominy and suffering with inexhaustible patience and gentleness, returns good for all evil without ostentation, and allows the fires of anger to rise again within his as little as he does the fires of desires. Just as he mortifies the will itself, so does he mortify its visibility, its objectivity, the body. He nourishes it sparingly, lest its vigorous flourishing and thriving should animate afresh and excite more strongly the will, of which it is the mere expression and mirror. Thus he resorts to fasting, and even to self-castigation and self-torture, in order that, by constant privation and suffering, he may more and more break down and kill the will that he recognizes and abhors as the source of his own suffering existence and of the world's.[164]

In this highly suspect biographical commentary, at least it is clear what Schopenhauer is committed to. As the body is the natural extension of the will, so long as the body survives so then does the will. For Schopenhauer, it is only through the continued practice of asceticism that we find solace in the denial of the will. But where does this leave our question concerning the relationship of the compassionate and the ascetic? I believe we must understand them to be for the most part simply separated by degrees. There are several reasons to believe this.

First, if we go along with Schopenhauer that compassion and salvation have the same root, to be different then they must have a different end. If the end of the compassionate is the transcendence of the empirical self in the attempt to identify with another, how is the ascetic's quest different? I believe they only differ in this way: asceticism is the practice that allows for the manifestation of compassion, aesthetic appreciation, and genius. We may have a slight recognition or glimpse of these phenomena through the course of our lives, but the ascetic seeks to follow these accidental clues towards something greater. Understood this way, we are able to overcome our wills to a matter of degree. Some, of course, are able to execute this with greater consistency than others, some never try. We are moral then to the degree that we can practice the technique to become moral beings, to be awakened with the intuitive inner knowledge and understanding.

Another reason we have to believe that the compassionate and the ascetic are one is by looking at the exemplars of Schopenhauer's ascetic ideal. David Cartwright claims the following:

> Certainly, Schopenhauer recognizes degrees of compassion, which he usually cashes out in terms of the sacrifice one makes to relieve another's suffering. Schopenhauer's saint is not motivated to act out of compassion, because of the type of knowledge he or she obtains intuitively concerning the will. I'm not sure that the saint's reason defeats passion

---

[164] WWR 1 Pg.382

> here, rather it seems that Schopenhauer's saints are not characters inclined to compassion in the first place. Certainly, what does defeat passion (will) in all instances is some form of pure, willess cognition. It seems that in compassion what is defeated are malicious and egoistic forms of willing when the suffering of the other is that which moves an agent either to refrain from some action harming another or to perform an action aimed at relieving the other's suffering. This seems to have little to do with what generalizations one might make about the ubiquity of suffering or about suffering being essential to life.[165]

Cartwright's claim here is a good representation of much of the secondary literature. First, there is a strong belief that because Schopenhauer claims that saintliness is the direct result of intuitive knowledge, that it must be different than compassion in some essential capacity. Second, following this notion, in the secondary literature Schopenhauer's saint begins to adopt strange characteristics which follow the passage I drew attention to at the start of this section.

I believe this view is incorrect for two reasons. First, Schopenhauer makes no mention in *On the Basis of Morality* of intuitive knowledge or its possible relation to the manifestation of compassion. However, neither does he there, or anywhere, make the claim that compassion is not a result of that knowledge. On the other hand, he does claim that compassion and asceticism share a common root. What could that be if not for intuitive knowledge?

Secondly, Schopenhauer's saints are not the same as the Kantian 'saints' or moral 'saints' discussed by Susan Wolf in her popular paper. They are not philosophical constructions or extensions of a particular theory. It is important to understand that Schopenhauer's intuitions about morality are driven by what he refers to as 'empirical observations'. Schopenhauer believed in his theory of salvation because it corresponded so well with his knowledge of religious traditions, and more importantly, well known spiritual exemplars of the time. Of course, he chose to favorably interpret some evidence of correspondence while passing over even entire religious traditions that did not correspond to his pessimistic characterization of human nature (Judaism and Islam in particular). However, the saints who he chose as exemplars of his notion of salvation were not philosophical constructions, but rather historical figures. There are several examples of ascetic saints in *World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer's favorites were Meister Eckhart, Jesus Christ, Madame de Guyon, Francis of Assisi, and of course, the Buddha Guatama Siddhartha. If, according to Cartwright and others, it were the case that Schopenhauer's saints are "not characters inclined to compassion in the first place", why would he choose to use as examples of the ascetic life, individuals who are the very exemplification of compassion? Aside form Eckhart (whose life we know little about), every one of Schopenhauer's saints lead lives committed to service and compassion, far from the detached contemplative ascetic of Schopenhauer's critics. If Schopenhauer believed that the compassionate person and acetic saint were two different types of persons, why would he choose such obviously counterintuitive examples, or

[165] Personal correspondence.

even use examples at all? The answer is because the compassionate person and the saint are figures on the same path, differing only by matters of degree at different times. If the knowledge resulting in the denial of the will-to-live is the phenomenon responsible for the quieting of the will, it must also responsible for the manifestation of the will-for-another, or compassion. This is the important conclusion of this section, i.e. that Schopenhauer's doctrine of the denial of the will-to-live is also the doctrine of the manifestation of compassion. This is the missing premise from *On the Basis of Morality*. Although our character cannot change itself via the will, *there is a method, or more importantly, a practice to allow oneself a greater experience of compassion.*

It is clear that through his doctrine of salvation, Schopenhauer's pessimistic worldview is not nihilistic. There is emancipation from the inevitable suffering experienced in conventional reality of life. We can achieve this salvation through the renunciation of the will-to-live. He also posits a practical method to achieve such salvation. Although it has been seldom achieved in its fullest glory, we do on occasion each glimpse at the possibility of salvation through the extra-ordinary occasions of compassion or sublimity, or intellectual insight. It has also become clear, as it was not at the end of *On the Basis of Morality*, that although compassion cannot be willed, it can be nurtured. The means of this nurturing, for Schopenhauer, is through the ascetic denial of the will. We have also seem that compassion is an integral and inevitable aspect of the transformation from the selfish will to the denial of the will-to-live. To seek salvation is to become compassionate. These actions cannot be exclusive for they flow from the same source and become manifest through the same practice.

In light of Schopenhauer's account of salvation, several questions remain. If the manifestation of compassion is possible, i.e. if we hope to draw a normative conception of compassion from it, what will our picture of the compassionate person look like? If we agree fully with Schopenhauer's description of the ascetic saint, the compassionate person will wear a hair shirt, deny all natural pleasurable impulses, and live a life of destitute poverty and servitude. This form of moral life is still not as demanding as the categorical imperative, but neither is it acceptable to us. Can we understand Schopenhauer's idea of salvation in another way? Is it possible to discover an alterative "quieter of the will"? In the next section, I will suggest an alternative method that avoids scratchy garments but holds close to Schopenhauer's main premises.

The Manifestation of Compassion

> Since you are a part of and governed by Nature, observe and accept what your physical nature needs. Act on these needs, provide your living being does not become degraded by them. Observe also what your individual nature requires of you as a compassionate being. This you must also do provide your rational and social nature is not made worse by it. If you use these rules, there is no need to worry about anything else.
>
> Marcus Aurelius

In order to formulate a possible alternative to Schopenhauer's compassionate ascetic saint, I hope to follow a thread of thinking that follows and supplements his notion of salvation but is more historically and conceptually accurate. It is difficult to say from Schopenhauer's mixed comments in the first volume of *World as Will and Representation* how clear his understanding of Buddhism was. He himself admitted that while writing the first volume of *World as Will and Representation*, he has only a passing familiarity with Buddhism through an incomplete set of comments written about Burmese Buddhists of the Theravada tradition. In the second volume of *World as Will and Representation*, after having had the opportunity to read more complete accounts of the Mahayana tradition (from China and Japan), he recounts his amazement at discovering the vast similarity between the northern Buddhist thought and his own philosophical system. Although he does not take the time to describe the inadequacies of his first account, we understand from Schopenhauer's own reflection that he was certainly not convinced at its adequacy. I hope to show how Schopenhauer's initial misunderstanding of an aspect of Buddhist practice can be corrected to simplify and clarify the mode of transition from willing-self to the compassionate-saint of *World as Will and Representation.*

I wish to recall a passage quoted in the previous section, Schopenhauer's re-telling of the Buddha's enlightenment.

> He (the Buddha) therefore endures such ignominy and suffering with inexhaustible patience and gentleness, returns good for all evil without ostentation, and allows the fires of anger to rise again within his as little as he does the fires of desires. Just as he mortifies the will itself, so does he mortify its visibility, its objectivity, the body. He nourishes it sparingly, lest its vigorous flourishing and thriving should animate afresh and excite more strongly the will, of which it is the mere expression and mirror. Thus he resorts to fasting, and even to self-castigation and self-torture, in order that, by constant privation and suffering, he may more and more break down and kill the will that he recognizes and abhors as the source of his own suffering existence and of the world's.[166]

This description is the strongest clue that Schopenhauer significant misunderstands both the historical Buddha Guatama and perhaps some aspects of the fundamental principles of Buddhism. If we recall the description of the Buddha from chapter four, after departing his noble family and life, the young Buddha did practice asceticism and mortification for many years. Only after his

---

[166] WWR 1 Pg.382

frustration with this life did his practice change to what we consider now as the historical path to Buddhist enlightenment. Apart from sexual abstinence, Buddhists do not practice any form of ritual mortification or other traditionally conceived ascetic practices. Not to say that the discipline of a well trained monk or nun cannot be seen in incomparable feats of physical stamina and endurance, on the contrary; however the important point is that Buddhists do not practice asceticism as a means to enlightenment.

Thich Nhat Hahn describes the historical Buddha's transition from asceticism to contemporary Buddhist contemplative practice.

> But Siddhartha's austerities began to alarm even his five companions, and they found it impossible to keep up with him. Siddhartha ceased bathing in the river or even taking his share of the food. On some days he just ate a shriveled guava he happened to find on the ground or a piece of dried buffalo manure. His body had become terribly wasted—it was little more than loose flesh hanging on protruding bones. He had not cut his hair or beard in six months, and when he rubbed his head, handfuls of hair fell out as if there were no longer any space for it to grow on the bit of flesh still clinging to his skull.
>
> And then one day, while practicing sitting meditation in a cemetery, Siddhartha realized how wrong the path of self mortification was....He realized that the body and mind formed one reality which could not be separated. The peace and comfort of the body were directly related to the peace and comfort of the mind. To abuse the body was to abuse the mind.[167]

Shortly after this realization, Siddhartha Guatama abandoned asceticism and replenished his physical strength. It was soon after this that he reached enlightenment, sitting under a tree practicing only sitting meditation and mindfulness. This transition is perhaps the most important characteristic that distinguishes the beginning of Buddhism and its historical transition from the Brahman tradition.

If Schopenhauer is mistaken in attributing ascetic practice as the means to the Buddha's experience of enlightenment, perhaps we can take a clue from the historically accurate picture of the Buddha's transition. I need to make one caveat at this time which is that I am by no means a Buddhist scholar. Although my sources are highly credible, my account of the history of Buddhism is not comprehensive, nor is it meant to be. The particular tradition of Buddhism I will discuss here is Mahayana Zen Buddhism. I choose Zen, primarily due to its fundamental focus on the tradition of contemplation and also due to the tradition's indifference to metaphysics and metaphysical system making. There is nothing wrong with metaphysics per se, but Zen's focus on practice is primarily what we are interested in here. I choose Sōtō Zen rather than the more familiar form of Rinzai Zen of D.T. Suzuki again because of Sōtō's emphasis on zazen or sitting contemplation. The source for the discussion of Sōtō will be the Japanese monk Taisen Deshimaru. I choose to discuss Deshimaru because he is the recipient of the transmission of mind from his master Kodo Sawaki whose lineage is traced back through the great masters Dogen in the eleventh century and Bodhidharma

---

[167] Nhat Hanh, Thich. *Old Path White Clouds*. Pg.105

and Guatama Buddha before him. In Buddhism, the legacy of the transmission is an essential tradition ensuring the integrity of traditional understanding. Therefore, Deshimaru's credential's for discussion and teaching Zen are impeccable unlike many popular Zen writers who have no particular credentials.[168] Deshimaru, having been born and educated in Japan, live for over two decades in France as it was his mission to introduce Zen to the occident. He subsequently familiarized himself with Western culture, philosophy, and psychology, and directed much of his teaching toward the Western mind.

What we are looking for in our Zen account is an explanation of the difference between ascetic practice and the practice the Buddha undertook on the path to enlightenment. This difference might give us a substantial clue in our attempt to understand Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation in a new light. If we can attempt to discover an alternative picture of practice that results in the same denial of the will that Schopenhauer described, it might be possible to rethink the possibility of a normative conception of compassion. If there is a method that results in the denial of the will, and subsequently with the manifestation of compassion, perhaps we can interpret it in a broader sense that traditional Buddhist or even strictly religious practice.

It is possible for one to charge that I might be choosing a particularly suitable example of Buddhism to support my claim. I would suggest that the core of Deshimaru's teaching on meditation can be found in any contemplative tradition, not even exclusively Buddhist. There are certainly more famous or scholastic Buddhist traditions and certainly traditions accented with greater cannons of literature. Perhaps the most prolific psychological branch of Mahayana is the Tibetan tradition. I maintain, however, that we could easily make the same claims using the Tibetan school as our starting point, but this would involve introducing a rather esoteric metaphysics into our picture. I have therefore chosen to articulate a view that is perhaps the simplest and the most readily digestible for the purposes of discussion here. I would expect and hope that similar connections could be made between Schopenhauer's conception of salvation and any form of spiritual tradition that emphasizes meditation or contemplative prayer as a central practice.

The many traditions of Buddhism hold in common several fundamental beliefs. The most important of these, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, are both discussed in chapter four, *The Buddhist Conception of Compassion*. We have already mentioned the profound similarity between the descriptive accounts of reality found in both the *Four Noble Truths* and the *World as Will and Representation*. It is clear that Schopenhauer and the Buddhist tradition share a common starting point. The interpretation of the *Eightfold Path*, however, is where Schopenhauer departs significantly. I should also mention here that it is in the interpretation and emphasis of the aspects of the *Eightfold Path* that also result in much of the divergence in Buddhist traditions as well.

---

[168] Here I am thinking of Phillippe Kapleau, Allan Watts, etc.

The Mahayana tradition emerged as a response to earlier intellectual Buddhist traditions that failed to integrate the actual mindful practice of the Buddha as a vehicle of enlightenment. It was the monk Bodhidharma who first took Buddhism to China and subsequently planted the seed of the Mahayana tradition that is still prevalent today. Bodhidharma is also known as the founder and patron saint of the Zen tradition. The Zen tradition emphasizes the practice of sitting meditation (zazen) as the most essential vehicle of Buddhist enlightenment. Although this practice only embodies two or three aspects of the Eightfold Path, Zen practitioners from the time of the Buddha have established the sitting posture of the Buddha as the practice through which one realizes all other virtues of the path.

Taking the cue form the Buddha's enlightenment, Bodhidharma was said to have lived in a cave for six years, staring at the wall, sitting to gain enlightenment. With his example firmly established, Zen, or in Chinese Ch'an, became firmly established as the preferred practice of meditation, the essence of Buddhism. Zen means meditation. In zazen, one sits and concentrates on the breath. There is no thinking, no anticipation, just concentration. If we are to liken this practice, then, to Schopenhauer's ideal of salvation, it will be useful to discover what to goal of Zen is and how and what exactly becomes manifest as a result of its practice. Why ought one to sit? And how can simple sitting be the source of emancipation for the will?

> During Zazen, brain and consciousness become pure. It's exactly like muddy water left to stand in a glass. Little by little, the sediment sinks to the bottom and the water becomes pure.[169]

One of the first aspects of Zen that a practitioner must learn is to quite the mind. This is done primarily on focusing on breathing and when they arise, allowing thoughts to pass from consciousness without engaging them. This is the most difficult period for the beginner as our conventional consciousness does not readily surrender its activity. Unlike the ritual mortification of the ascetics, Zen practice is far less dramatic. Discipline, however, is required to focus one's concentration over long periods of time. The transformation of consciousness in Zen is also said to be facilitated by the posture of the body during zazen. Commonly, one sits of two pillows, a flat mat underneath and a round *zafu* under the buttocks. This posture tilts the pelvis forward and straightens the back. The legs are in a lotus position, hands resting in the lap, head up, chin in. The advantage of the posture of zazen is realized through the ability to sit in this posture for extended periods of time after the practitioner has become comfortable in it. After Kodo Sawaki's death, Deshimaru himself sat in this position for twenty days straight.

---

[169] Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Ring of the Way*. Pg.8

The physical aspect of sitting and concentrating is the essence of Zen practice. That something so seemingly simply is troublesome to the intellectual mind. The content of Zen enlightenment in this sense seems to lack intellectual substance. However, this is the fundamental difference the Zen practitioner recognizes between knowing and doing.

> Zen is zazen: meditation, the essence of religion, beyond religions and philosophies, but through the experience of the body. Concentration here and now. The philosophy of Zen can only be understood through practice.[170]

This bodily knowing lies at the source of the Zen experience. This is similar to the mechanism by which Schopenhauer believed the ascetic is emancipated from the will, however, this is not a result of mortification, but concentration.

Although the phenomenon of Zen has spawned a veritable publishing industry, the Zen master is apprehensive to intellectualize the attributes of Zen. At times, after zazen, the master will give a short lecture on aspects of Buddhism called a *mondo* and engage in a question and answer session called a *kusen*. The substance of Deshimaru's teaching is expressed in these forms of communication. It is also important to note that the practitioners would have heard these comments immediately after zazen. Therefore they would be mindful of the important distinction between practice and factual knowledge. The master will often attempt to give form to the intuitions that arise from the practice of Zen. Buddhist psychology differs radically from tradition to tradition, but there are many shared aspects. The notion of *Karma*, and the deep cosmic *hishiryo* consciousness are two examples of fundamental aspects of Buddhist psychology. Zen psychology is simple and pragmatic compared to more esoteric forms of Buddhism. Parsimony seems to be the guiding principle at work as the commentary about meditation never strays far away from the matter of hand, the immediate experiences of Zen consciousness. It is interesting to note the similarities of Schopenhauer's account of enlightenment with the Zen account. Recall Schopenhauer's insistence that through practice the ascetic realize a unique or intuitive form of knowledge. This knowledge cannot be representative knowledge as is manifest in our conventional understanding of reality but must have a fundamentally different character. Schopenhauer refers to it as intuitive knowledge which cannot manifest by thinking per se. Deshimaru refers to the knowledge recognized through practice as a realization of a unique form of consciousness called *hishiryo*, or cosmic consciousness.

> In the *Funkanzazengi*, by Master Dogen it is written that we must think about non-thinking. That is, we must think from the bottom of non-thinking. Do not think about thinking, says Master Dogen. Think non-thinking. How? How do we think about non-thinking? Through Hishiryo. Hishiryo is absolute thinking. In terms of contemporary physics this means to stop the thinking process which occurs in our frontal brains, and to think, instead, with our body. That is, to stop the thinking process of our personal consciousness,[171]

---

[170] Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Ring of the Way*. Pg.26
[171] Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Voice of the Valley*. Pg.19

Through bodily mortification, Schopenhauer believed that the ascetic glimpsed through the phenomenal realm to the underlying reality of self and other. This 'seeing through' the principle of individuation (*principium individuationis*) past the self to the unity of all beings allowed for the realization of the unity of all beings. It is this special knowledge, this experience that lies at the source of salvation or enlightenment. For the Zen practitioner, it is also the source of transcendence of conventional reality.

> We must think from the depths of unthinking. *Hishiryo* is the summit, the explosion, eruption, orgasm of consciousness, beyond thought; it is absolute, universal thought. Hishiryo is cosmic consciousness as distinct from individual consciousness; it is the ultimate consciousness beyond space and time. How do you think without thinking? That is the whole art of zazen. Concentrate on your posture and let your thoughts pass by, without dwelling at any point of consciousness: if you continue in this way during zazen, your thoughts become larger, they expand in length and depth until they reach the universal consciousness, beyond space and time.[172]

It is interesting that Deshimaru characterize *hishiryo* as transcending the very structures that constitute the manifestation of conventional reality in Kantian/Schopenhauerian metaphysics. It is also important to note that the Zen conception of *hishiryo* also defies intellectual characterization and can only be manifest as a result of introspective practice (zazen). Recall that for Schopenhauer it is our phenomenal character which is always and forever governed by these structures through the principle of sufficient reason. We can never be free of our will so long as the conventional nature of our character is determining our actions. Hence, it is difficult to see beyond the conventional reality of the will to live. Even to imagine the possibility of transcendence is no help as the faculty of imagination is also governed by the same inevitable causal forces. What both theories strive towards is an understanding rooted in practice apart from and transcending ordinary epistemic boundaries.

What is to prevent the natural intuitive realization of this hishiryo consciousness? The answer in Zen is strikingly similar to Schopenhauer's idea of the will-to-live. The cosmic consciousness of Zen is forever concealed by *karma*. In Zen, our *karma* is our will. *Karma* is the ever existing manifestation of the causal nexus of one's world. *Karma* is cause and effect, and is as close to Schopenhauer's conception of the will-to-live as one could imagine. In my understanding, they are virtually indistinguishable. The goal of Schopenhauer's theory of salvation is the transcendence of the will-to-live, to be emancipated from the cause and effect of the individual will. The enlightenment of Zen is realized through the transcendence of *karma*.

> Every individual has a karma, habits, customs. This is why every person understands something different from my teaching, because they see it through their own karma. Instead, we should hear it through *hishiryo* consciousness, without ego, without a personal consciousness. You must cut away your private categories, must have empty

---

[172] Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Ring of the Way*. Pg.76

> hands and an empty head. The power of karma is strong in everyone, stupid or clever. When that force is broken, it becomes possible to understand Zen. Most people are lead, governed by their karma. They run after what they love, what attracts and impresses them. Don't be deceived by karma. We must go ahead of time, ahead of eternity; find the world without karma.[173]

This description of the transcendence of *karma* should immediately remind us on Schopenhauer's description of the transcendence of the will-to-live. The ascetic transcends the will-to-live by the practice of mortification of the body. Through this practice the ascetic comes to experience intuitive knowledge, the knowledge that provides the experience of the 'new birth' as Schopenhauer calls it, the recognition of the unity of being, the glimpse into the noumenal realm. In Zen, it is *karma* that is overcome. The ego or the character is the domain of influence of *karma*, when our ego is silenced we see beyond it, think in a new way. This is the manifestation of *hishiryo*, to think without thinking.

Deshimaru and Schopenhauer are equally skeptical about the substance of the intellectual discussion of the experience of deep understanding. Similarly, neither recognizes *karma* or the will as being potentially responsible for any enlightened action. If we are to set aside willing, to transcend *karma*, a means must be utilized outside the will to facilitate this experience. We must remove ourselves from the effects of karma, the effects of the will-to-live. Only then do we realize the potential to act for others, to act unselfishly.

> Action or karma, is the realization of the fundamental cosmic power on man. If this substance of action, or of karma, becomes one with the will, the root of all movement is solved. This fundamental cosmic power can be realized within our own personal will—through zazen. Once this is realized, our own will is directed by the cosmic force, it is no longer a question of one's own will-power—it is a question of hishiryo-consciousness.[174]

In both accounts, it is only when we are acting from outside the will-to-live, or beyond *karma*, that we can in Atwell's words, participate in 'objective' willing, willing that is motivated from outside our subjective domain of concern. The 'cosmic' aspect of *hishiryo* consciousness then is the recognition of the universal bond of all living things, similar to Schopenhauer's conception of the 'world soul'. Of course, both these ideas have similar Brahman roots, so it is not difficult to recognize the similarities.

For Schopenhauer, it is the recognition of this universality, the glimpse beyond the principle of individuation, which makes possible acts of compassion. Not only does it allow for the recognition of the existence of suffering (this is also possible in conventional reality) but it compels an agent to act in the interests of others, which for Schopenhauer, is the mystery of ethics. In Zen, compassion is manifest also through practice, also through the recognition of the universality of suffering and the overwhelming desire to alleviate that suffering. It is in the revealing of *hishiryo* consciousness that the universality of the self is also

---

[173] Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Ring of the Way*. Pg.24
[174] Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Voice of the Valley*. Pg.10

recognized. This is the end result of Zen practice, the experience of enlightenment.

> All existences are bound together. They have the same root. You and I are tied together. Your happiness is my happiness. My happiness is your happiness. That is a true law or precept, having nothing to do with morality. If you understand the precept, you can understand morality. This isn't shallow moralizing, but true sartori. The precept grow out of the spirit of compassion. Out of that precept is born the shower of pure nectar of the Dharma, the voice of the valley, beautiful music.[175]

Deshimaru's characterization of morality is interesting in that it stems from the recognition of a more fundamental aspect of reality. He does not consider true morality to be a social artifact, but the recognition of the true nature of one's universe. Morality, then, is the experience of the authentic nature of human being. This characterization is not metaphysical, however, but discovered only through the experience of enlightenment made possible through rigorous practice. When Schopenhauer refers to his own metaphysical explanation of morality, he does hint at the same conclusion. The 'mystery of ethics' is not solved with his mere explanation of the metaphysics of the phenomenon. In *On the Basis of Morality*, he is quite clear that his explanation is profoundly insufficient, and if anything, a stop-gap measure, an afterthought (which is how it is presented). With a clear understanding of his theory of salvation, it is easy to see why. There can be no coherent articulation of the source of morality, because it is an experience. The experience of the transcendence of the will-to-live cannot be accounted for or understood in any way other than to partake or share in it. Schopenhauer's reluctance to discuss the source of compassion has the same roots as all mystics share in their self-confessed inability to express the ineffable nature of the experience of transcendence.

The enlightenment of the Zen practitioner involves a certain freedom, the freedom from the effects of *karma* that result in selfish willing. Freedom, for the individual is only recognized in this transcendental state, the state beyond the selfish willing.

> The human consciousness had developed the concept of voluntary choice, a lucidly weighed option, a possibility that is not inevitable. In the lower orders of nature, the realm of minerals, plants, and animals, phenomena are governed by strict necessity alone, the physical law of determinism. If the required conditions are present, the phenomenon appears. But the determinism of the principle of causality can have no absolute power over the human psyche. The more a person wakes up to reality and understands it, the less influence determinism will have upon that person and the greater will be his or her freedom of action, autonomy, unpredictability.[176]

Deshimaru shares Schopenhauer's conception of the deterministic nature of conventional reality governed by the principle of sufficient reason. He also shares Schopenhauer's conception of freedom as being only a transcendental possibility

---

[175] Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Ring of the Way*. Pg.86
[176] Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Ring of the Way*. Pg.61

that is not recognized in the individual in the grasp of the will-to-live. Freedom, then, is only manifest with the recognition of the nature of a more fundamental reality. True freedom allows one to act in response to a calling outside one's own will.

In the same way that the experience of salvation is the source of compassion for Schopenhauer, so it is in the Zen picture. The goal of the Zen practitioner is to gain the enlightenment of the Buddha[177]. This end is articulated in what is referred to as the Bodhisattva ideal. If we recall, Schopenhauer's critics have difficulty reconciling what I have argued to be the case; that the experience of compassion and the experience of salvation are of the same source and differ only in degree. The argument goes, if we renounce the will, there can be no willing for others, no will for the good, no willing period. Therefore the renunciation of the will-to-live and the will-for-others are completely different phenomena. This same argument has played out in the history of Buddhism and resulted in both the establishment of Mahayana Buddhism and the Bodhisattva ideal. In the Hindu Brahman tradition, salvation was also based upon freeing oneself from the influence of *karma* which not only plagues this life but results in an un-ending cycle of re-birth and death. To realize salvation in this system was to become free of *karma* and end the cycle of re-birth. After Guatama Buddha's death, this Brahman metaphysics quick influenced the Buddhist ideal of salvation or enlightenment. According to this picture, if we achieve enlightenment, the will and the self vanish or become extinguished.

The practical aspect of this theory resulted in Buddhism becoming more and more esoteric and aloof, failing to keep in mind the suffering of others. The response in the creation of the Mahayana school was to re-integrate compassion and wisdom at the core of Buddhist practice. Hence the ideal of the Bodhisattva was created. The Bodhisattva, as discussed in the fourth chapter, is a being who upon reaching enlightenment remains active in the corporeal world to facilitate the subsequent enlightenment of all sentient beings. The Bodhisattva is at the same time a perfectly enlightened being as well as the manifestation of compassion.

> In Mahayana Buddhism the Four Great Bodhisattva Vows are the embodiment of our practice, an expression of a bodhisattva's wisdom and compassion. Wisdom and compassion are inseparable. Wisdom is the realization of the nature of the self and the universe. Compassion is the manifestation of that wisdom as the activity of the universe itself. The compassion keeps the bodhisattva functioning in the world. These vows are recited, reflected upon, and embraced every day by Zen students.[178]

In a situation similar to Schopenhauer's paradox of willing, the Mahayana tradition attempted to show that at the same time one could realize the renunciation of the individual will and remain as a functioning participant in the social world. One can manifest compassion as well as renounce the will. For the

---

[177] Although the Zen practitioner doe not formally have 'goals' in mind while practicing. In this sense, goals are more 'ideals'.

[178] Loori, John. *The Heart of Being: Moral and Ethical Teachings of Zen Buddhism*. Pg.132

Buddhist and for Schopenhauer, this situation is possible because the renunciation of the will is the vehicle through which compassion becomes a possibility.

To summarize this section: if we correct Schopenhauer's mistaken belief that ascetic practice is the vehicle to salvation or more appropriately, the denial of the will, and substitute the historically accurate conception that contemplative practice serves the same function, we see how Schopenhauer's notion of salvation bears an undeniable similarity to the enlightenment experience of Zen. Through contemplative practice, one can realize the transcendence of the individual ego and the influence of the will or *karma*. This practice allows for the manifestation of compassion through the realization of *hishiryo* consciousness or intuitive knowledge. This realization allows one to act for another's benefit through the transcendent experience of freedom from the will to live. Most importantly, this provides the framework for answering the question about the normative potential for our greater conception of compassion. If compassion is realizable by the individual, it is not through conventional knowledge, but rather an experience of authenticity realized through contemplative practice. In the next section I will examine the broadening of this conception to include not simply Zen practice, but other possible forms of contemplation and practice.

Contemplation and Compassion

One of the most interesting aspects I find in *World as Will and Representation* is Schopenhauer's understanding of the common root of religion. His account anticipates a still profoundly controversial attempt by modern spiritual theologians to establish a foundation for an ecumenical understanding of world religions. Figures like Thomas Merton, Anthony De Mello, Matthew Fox, William Johnston, Leonardo Boff, and others have all advanced the position that a common spirituality manifested through the practice of contemplation is the common root of religious life. Also, in advancing this position, all of the figures above have faced severe criticism and often disciplinary action as a result of attempting to emphasize this bridge. The conservative understanding of religious tradition has always resisted the move against proprietary characterization of spiritual enlightenment. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, believes this ecumenical understanding of enlightenment is the only saving grace of any religion.

> Quietism, i.e., the giving up of all willing, asceticism, i.e., intentional mortification of one's own will, and mysticism, i.e., consciousness of the identity of one's own inner being with that of all things, or with the kernel of the world, stand in the closest connection, so that whoever professes one of them is gradually lead to the acceptance of the others, even against his intention. Nothing can be more surprising than the agreement among the writers who express those teachings, in spite of the greatest difference of their age, country and religion, accompanied as it is by the absolute certainty and fervent assurance with which they state the permanence and consistency of their inner experience. They do not form some sect that adheres to, defends, and propagates a

> dogma theoretically popular and once adopted; on the contrary, they generally do not know of one another; in fact, the Indian, Christian, and Mohammedan mystics, quietists, and ascetics are different in every respect except in the inner meaning and spirit of their teaching.[179]

Schopenhauer, unlike the other philosopher's of religion at the time, took a profoundly practical view of religion and the manifestation of religious experience. Unlike Hegel's esoteric philosophy of religion, which attempted to trace the 'spirit's relationship to the absolute', in a much more existential sense, Schopenhauer attempted to determine what true value or relevance religion might have in the life of the individual. His effort resulted not in a metaphysical system, but rather a thesis on comparative religion. This picture may seem familiar in that it is the same approach as his investigation of ethics utilizes.

In a bold reaction to Kant and his philosophical contemporaries, the Kantian idealist Hegel, Fichte, Schleiermacher, etc., Schopenhauer attempts to focus on religion as practiced and articulated by what he considers to be its greatest exemplars. It is no surprise, then, to find contemplatives, without exclusion, occupying his focus. Schopenhauer is concerned with the effects of ethics and religion in life, not in theory. To this end, he discovers what he believes to be the common source of morality as well as religion.

In terms of religious scholarship, judging the accuracy of Schopenhauer's account is beyond the scope of our project here. Certainly there are contemporary advocates of the same picture at least in spirit if not in compete accordance with specific details. What we are concerned with here is the relationship of our revised picture of enlightenment to our revised look at the nature of compassion. There are two questions here. First, can we believe that Schopenhauer's conception of salvation is relevant to an account of how compassion may be manifest in life? Second, since it is the case that Schopenhauer uses only religious figures in his examples, can we develop an ethical account of compassion using purely religious grounds (assuming of course that we prefer ethical accounts to be secular or at least applicable to those outside particular religious traditions).

To answer the first question, it is certainly the case that Schopenhauer believes the source of morality and the source of enlightenment to be one in the same. More correctly, it is fair to assume that we can realize the manifestation of morality without enlightenment. Therefore, we might also assume that these two experiences vary only in degree or duration. Perhaps the moral person has glimpses of selflessness while the enlightened person can sustain a prolonged period of selflessness. As the goal of this work is to reassess Schopenhauer's theory of compassion, the burden of proof is not against us in wanting to draw a similar conclusion. In fact, the historical and philosophical accounts of compassion point towards the same conclusion. What we have established

---

[179] Schopenhauer, Arthur. *World as Will and Representation.* Vol.2 Pg.613

through many practical and conceptual examples is that compassion becomes a possibility when the selfish will is quieted and our authentic self is recognized. If this is also the means to a greater conceptual transformation then this should not exclude compassion in principle. It is also the case that while in some circumstances it is unclear how contemplation fits into the picture (the phenomenological accounts perhaps) this practice cannot be excluded out of hand. There is very strong evidence, especially in the case of Heidegger, that he precisely requires such a practice to link morality with his fundamental ontology of human existence. His intimacy with both Eastern philosophy and the Western mystical tradition certainly does not account as evidence against this picture. Perhaps the remained of this answer naturally bleeds into the response to the second question.

Our second question concerns the legitimacy of applying religious practices to secular or moral questions, i.e. attempting to suggest that contemplative practice can function outside the context of religion. In response, I suggest that it is precisely the practice of meditation or contemplation that, as a part of a greater religious life, can survive outside the context of religion. As our example of Zen Buddhism indicates, one can practice meditation with complete indifference to metaphysical doctrine, including even, positing or believing in the necessary existence of a supreme being. Schopenhauer was fond of Meister Eckhart's phrase that 'he need not seek God outside himself'. This seems to allow for the establishment of a practice or investigation without positing the conclusion. If we believe that compassion is a good and we wish to utilize this experience as a means of extending ourselves to others, why not suppose that a form of contemplative practice be the vehicle to the goal? What we seek in realizing compassion is not a particular believe in a doctrine about compassion. Rather, we seek the manifestation of an emotion, at least, a transformation of consciousness at most. If we follow the suggestion of the Zen tradition, or any of the ontological traditions we have discussed, what we desire is the discovery of a deeper, unifying, authentic self. In the experience of compassion we seek an authentic being-with-others in Heidegger's words.

What I hope to have shown in this section is that in revisiting Schopenhauer's account of salvation, we can draw from it a possibility within his system to transcend the so called will-to-live. If we then reformulate the means by which he suggests one can deny the will, we have presented a practice that has the potential to account for the intentional manifestation of compassion in one's life. I believe this insight compliments both Schopenhauer's original account and our own Redux. Not only have we complimented Schopenhauer's original conception of compassion and supplemented it extensively, we have shown how it can be expanded to include what Schopenhauer claimed was impossible; that compassion can indeed be taught and that we have both the moral and existential obligation to ourselves to learn it.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

To provide a clear conclusion I hope to summarize my re-reading of Schopenhauer in a series of points. After this brief summary I will conclude with some closing thoughts. In following Schopenhauer's lead in substance and spirit, I will suggest the following sketch of a new philosophical conception of compassion. I must emphasize, of course, that what I present here is only a sketch, for to give a complete and coherent account would demand much more attention, perhaps even another project of this scope. What I will present here is both a defense of Schopenhauer as well as a new starting point to think about compassion. The success of this project, of course, can be measured in terms of Schopenhauer's own criteria. Does the description avoid unrealistically restrictive reductions to naturalistic or psychological theories? Does the theory accurately describe the data, i.e. what we actually believe the manifestation of compassion to look like, and what we believe the potential of compassion to be. In this sense, even though our approach is philosophical, it still must meet these expectations imposed on it from outside exclusively philosophical worldviews.

Compassion is an authentic human response to the suffering of others.

One common theme of almost all the accounts we have considered is that compassion is not the contrived emotional response; it is not the result of the socialization of a sentimental society. Compassion is an authentic human response to the suffering of others. We do not require beliefs, attitudes, or intentions to feel compassion as it is manifest at a pre-cognitive level. However, the existence of particular beliefs and attitudes can certainly prevent the manifestation of compassion. Schopenhauer, for lack of a better explanation, posits this compassionate relationship as being metaphysical in nature, but the phenomenologists provide a more realistic account that consists more in the recognition of an authentic being-with-others or human-as-loving-being. The Buddhist and Christian accounts see manifesting compassion as the realization of authentic human nature, not to be constructed, but re-collected or realized.

Sobrino believes that compassion exists fundamentally as a response to suffering, not as a calculated reaction, act of duty, or moral commitment. For Schopenhauer, the failure to live compassionately is the failure to transcend one's selfish will. This picture is still reasonable in our account, perhaps with less existential emphasis on the failure of people to manifest compassion, and more emphasis on the social structures that indoctrinate individuals with false beliefs and values. Schopenhauer help that social beliefs were responsible for justice, i.e. prevented us from harming one another. With Schopenhauer's negative justice being already grounded in the essential social nature of the individual, the role of socialization need not be protected from rigorous scrutiny. This will allow us to examine the social structures that systematically prevent the free manifestation of compassion. This examination, based on our conception of compassion, must be considered one of the most essential uncompleted philosophical projects.

Most importantly, compassion must provide an existential ground, or source of strength, for just action and peace-making. If we recognize our moral world to extend outside ourselves, in compassion, there is no rational distinction between the suffering of our fellow humans or others sentient beings capable of suffering. The magnitude of suffering in the world is simply overwhelming. Our traditional mechanisms of defense in this regard unfortunately close up moral and cognitive boundaries simply to provide for our psychological survival. Compassion must provide a connection and a ground for the extension of moral consideration that allows us both the motivation to help others but not become overwhelmed in a universe of suffering. Unfortunately, this has become a significant difficulty in adopting a lifestyle of action and activism. The state of the world has changed so much since Schopenhauer's time that one could only imagine the pessimistic picture he might offer now. Compassion must act as the ground of 'suffering shared' in Scheler's words. It must provide the existential ground to conceive of the depths of suffering in one's moral sphere, but also to navigate it without compromising one's own psychological integrity. Accounting for the potential of compassion in this way is itself worthy of a substantial philosophical account.

Compassion is not enough for morality.

It is Schopenhauer's desire to ground all moral action in compassion. Sobrino also calls for compassion to 'reign in' instrumental reason. On the other hand, the psychological accounts of compassion argue that compassion without a rational governor is mere 'bleeding heart' sentimentality. As we have argued, following the Buddhist account, compassion and wisdom must operate exclusively and in union to determine the course of true moral action. Wisdom without compassion has no motivation and compassion without wisdom is blind. What we require from compassion is the identification and the motivation to alleviate suffering and to do justice. What we require from wisdom is both instrumental rationality and also a deeper understanding of the 'causal nexus' we exist within. This includes psychological and philosophical insights into the nature of desire and suffering, insights that allow the freedom of action we require in helping others. This so called 'crazy wisdom' transcends the boundaries of conventional morality but is not ad-hoc. We realize that to make justice, we must understand, adapt to, and incorporate each individual's world view in the process of searching for peace and justice. The realization of compassion and wisdom to this end allow true freedom to act spontaneously and effectively outside the traditional restraints of social and moral norms.

Compassion is morally desirable and its manifestation must be a goal of moral theory.

Schopenhauer claimed that compassion was the foundation of morality. We have backed away from the exclusivity of that claim, but not from its essential content. I have argued that compassion is the ground of our moral action; it provides us the incentives to act for the interests of others. In this regard, this 'emotion' must take its rightful place inside the realm of philosophical morality. Unlike Schopenhauer, we do not require the abolition of Kantian or other 'reason based' accounts of morality. As Rawls has shown, reason is best applied to questions of justice where calculative indifference is utilized as a tool to determine the fair distribution of resources. In these questions, the motivation why one ought to be fair is seldom questioned, or in the case that it is, is never adequately accounted for. In Schopenhauer's spirit, I argue that we need compassion as a ground for morality, not only in the traditional dramatic scenarios of philosophical morality, but in every aspect of our day to day lives. Yet, as we have seen, the search for the key to manifesting compassion does not occur in the realm of philosophy, at least not traditionally conceived. What we require is a philosophical description of compassion that accounts for the contemplative or introspective practice that has been long divorced from the academic world. As we have argued, it is this practice, that may be conceivable as a philosophical practice, that allows for the manifestation of Schopenhauer's 'intuitive' knowledge, the knowledge that allows the true nature of the self to shine forth. For Schopenhauer, this knowledge is the ground of morality, for us, the ground of compassion.

If we think back to the era of pre-enlightenment philosophy to the figures who represented the paradigms of religious and philosophical virtue, this knowledge may have been commonly manifested and understood. Perhaps the secularization of philosophy overlooked a seemingly spiritual practice that was unnecessarily abandoned with the purge of the religious from secular thought. If we follow Schopenhauer's lead, we might find the road back to this special knowledge and the re-introduction of compassion to the realm of philosophy.

Selected Bibliography

Books:

Abe, Masao. *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995

Atwell, John. *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of the Will*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995

Atwell, John. *Schopenhauer: The Human Character*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990

Austin, James H. *Zen and the Brain*. Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1999

Berrigan, Daniel & Hahn, Thich Nhat. *The Raft is Not the Shore*. Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1975

Boff, Leonardo. *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988

Bykhovsky, Bernard. *Schopenhauer and the Ground of Existence*. Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner Publishing Co., 1984

Copleston, Frederick S.J. *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism*. Oxford: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1946

Dauer, Dorthea. *Schopenhauer as Transmitter of Buddhist Thoughts*. Berne: Herbert Lange and Co. 1969

Deeken, Alfons. *Process and Permanence in Ethics: Max Scheler's Moral Philosophy*. New York: Paulist Press, 1974

Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Voice of the Valley*. New York: Bobbs-Merill Company, 1979

Deshimaru, Taisen. *The Ring of the Way*. London: Rider, 1983

Finley, James. *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*. Notre Dame Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1978

Forstater, Mark. *The Spiritual Teachings of Marcus Aurelius*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001

Fox, Matthew. *Passion for Creation*. Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1980

Fox, Matthew. *A Spirituality Named Compassion*. Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1979

Fox, Michael. *Schopenhauer: His Philosophical Achievement*. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980

Grossman, Dave. *On Killing: The Psychological Costs of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1995

Hamlyn, D.W. *Schopenhauer*. London. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980

Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Zen Keys*. New York: Doubleday, 1995

Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The Heart of Buddha's Teachings*. New York: Broadway Books, 1998

Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Old Path White Clouds*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991

Hatab, Lawrence. *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000

Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Albany: Suny Press. 1996

Heidegger, Martin. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992

James, William. *Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Random House, 1994

Janaway, Christopher (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999

Kishan, B.V. *Schopenhauer's Conception of Salvation*. Waltair: Andhra University Press, 1978

Kohn, Alfie. *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*. USA: Harper Collins, 1990

Loori, Daido. *The Heart of Being*. Boston: Charles Tuttle Co. 1996

Magee, Bryan. *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993

Merton, Thomas. *The Asian Journals of Thomas Merton*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1969

Merton, Thomas. *The Ascent to Truth*. New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1951

Merton, Thomas. *Contemplative Prayer*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969

Monks of New Skete. *The Art of Raising a Puppy*. New York: Little Brown & Co., 1991

Nussbaum, Martha. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001

Pennington, Basil. *Thomas Merton: My Brother*. New York: New City Press, 1996

Ramachandran, V.S. *Phantoms in the Brain*. New York: William Morrow, 1998

Safranski, Rudiger. *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1989

Scheler, Max. *On Feeling, Knowing, and Valuing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992

Scheler, Max. *Person and Self-Value*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987

Scheler, Max. *The Nature of Sympathy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *On The Will in Nature*. New York: Berg, 1992

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *On the Basis of Morality*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. Vols. 1&2 New York: Dover Publications, 1969

Schopenhauer, Arthur. Parerga and Paralipomena. Vols. 1&2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000

Sober, Elliot & Wilson, David. *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998

Sobrino, John. *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People From the Cross*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997

Trungpa, Chogyam. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism.* Boston: Shambhala, 1987

Young, Julian. *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987

Papers:

Abelson, Peter. "Schopenhauer and Buddhism". *Philosophy East and West*, 43(2) 255-278, 1993

Beane, Wendell. "Buddhist Causality and Compassion". Religious Studies. 10, 441-456, 1974

Blume, Lawrence. "Compassion" in *The Virtues: Contemporary Essays in Moral Character*, ed. Robert Krushwitz& Robert C. Roberts. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1987

Cartwright, David. "Compassion". *Zeit der Ernte: Festschrift fur Arthur Hubscher zum 85*. Geburtstag ed. Wolfgang Schirmacher. (Stuttgart am Bad Cannstaft: Frommann-Holzboog, 1982)

Cartwright, David. "Schopenhauer's Compassion and Nietzsche's Pity". *Schopenhauer Jarhbuch*, 69, 557-567. 1988

Da Silva, Jose. "Compassion in Mahayana Buddhism". *Revista Porta de Filosofia*. 52(1-4), 813-830 1996

Maidan, Michael. "Max Scheler's Criticism of Schopenhauer's Account of Morality and Compassion". *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 20, 225-235, 1989

Martinez, Roy. "An Ethic of Compassion in a World of Technique". *Laval Journal for Theology and Philosophy*, 54(1), 83-90 1998

Migotti, Mark. "Schopenhauer's Pessimism and the Unconditioned Good". *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33, 639-655, 1995

Nussbaum, Martha. "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion". *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13, 27-58, 1996

Piper, Adrian. "Impartiality, Compassion, and Modal Imagination." *Ethics 101* 726-757, 1991

Prior, William. "Compasion: A Critique of Moral Rationalism". *Philosophical Theology*, 2, 173-191, 1987

Radcliff, Dana. "Compassion and Commanded Love". *Faith and Philosophy.* 11(1), 50-71, 1995

Raschke, Carl. "Schopenhauer on the Delusion of Progress". *Schopenhauer Jarhbuch*, 58, 73-86, 1977

Schalow, Frank. "Language and the Roots of Conscience". *Human Studies*, 21(2), 141-156 April 98

Schalow, Frank. "The Topography of Heidegger's Conception of Conscience". *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 69(2), 255-273, 1995

Schalow, Frank. "The Temporality of an Original Ethics". *International Studies in Philosophy*, 25(1), 55-67, 1993

Sherover, Charles. "Founding and Existential Ethic". *Human Studies*, 4, 223-236 1981

Snow, Nancy. "Compassion". *American Philosophical Quarterly.* 195-205, 1991

Snow, Nancy. "Empathy". *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 37(1), 65-78, 2000

Sobrino, Jon. S.J. "Compassion: The Shaping Principle of the Human and of the Christian". *Campion College*, 1992

Teuber, Andreas. "Simone Weil: Equality as Compassion". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 43, 221-238, 1982

Walsh-Frank, Patricia. "Compassion: An East-West Comparison". *Asian Philosophy*, 6(1) 5-16 Mr. 1996

Wolf, Susan. "Moral Saints". *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXIX (8) 419-439, 1982